THE Hudson REVIEW

ITALO SVEVO:
Father and Son—a story

BEN REID:
Papa Haydn's Dead and Gone—a story

HERBERT READ:
The True Voice of John Keats

MARK SCHORER:
Women in Love and Death

VIVIAN MERCIER:
Gide: the Life or the Work?

POETRY BY WILLIAM ALFRED, SHIRLEY FREISINGER, MAC HAMMOND, RICHARD HOWARD, WINTHROP PALMER, VERNON WATKINS, RICHARD WILBUR.

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS BY ROBERT M. ADAMS, GEORGE BARBAROW, HUGH KENNER, R. W. B. LEWIS, FREDERICK MORGAN, MARVIN MUDRICK, MALCOLM M. ROSS.

VOLUME VI, NUMBER 1 • SPRING 1953 • $1.00 PER COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DOUBLEDAY *Literary Events*

"A mighty persuasive novel. The idiom is superb. It is the most 'Southern' novel imaginable and yet universal in its implications." —HUDSON STRODE

PRESENTING

Ovid Williams Pierce

and his extraordinary first novel

FRANCES GRAY PATTON: "It was refreshing to read a novel about the South which avoids equally the old cliché of romantic grandeur and the newer clichés of degeneracy and violence."

ROBERT HILLYER: "An absorbing and beautiful book. The characters are not only alive and memorable; they are deeply touching."

RAY B. WEST, JR. "More than any other recent novel I have read, this one seems to pick up and incorporate the virtues of the 'Southern novel.'"

THOMAS SANCTON: "It involves the longings in a human heart . . . portrayed with a dignity, a strength, which gives this novel a meaning that will last through time."

THE PLANTATION

The magnificent story of a crisis on a Southern plantation . . . of the gentle and courageous owner who has given his life to it . . . and the people, black and white, who owe their life to it. $3

THE PASSION BY THE BROOK

By TRUMAN NELSON, author of *The Sin of the Prophet.* A novel about Brook Farm—the famous experiment in communal living—and its men and women striving for love and liberty. $3.95

THE NEXT MILLION YEARS

By CHARLES GALTON DARWIN. What will life be like in the grave new world we are entering? Here is a brilliant insight into the future and a revealing forecast of things to come—by one of the world's leading physicists and grandson of the author of *The Origin of Species.* $2.75

ROME AND A VILLA

By ELEANOR CLARK. Illustrated by *Eugene Berman.* "No one I can think of, not even Ruskin or Pater, has been able more successfully to convey the essence of visual art in words."—EMILY GENAUER, *N. Y. Herald Tribune.* 4th printing $4

At all booksellers DOUBLEDAY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

announces the publication of

FEELING AND FORM

A THEORY OF ART DEVELOPED FROM PHILOSOPHY IN A NEW KEY

Susanne K. Langer's

new book

●

Everyone seriously concerned with the arts will welcome this major new contribution to the world of ideas.

At all bookstores, $7.00

THE CUMMINGTON SCHOOL OF ARTS

Summer Workshops in Writing, Painting, Music

JULY 6—AUGUST 16

Writing:
Francis Golffing, Harry Duncan

Painting:
Theodoros Stamos

Music:
Alan Houhannes, Carl Mosbacher, Sydney Harth

Address inquiries to:

Mr. FRANCIS GOLFFING
Bennington College, Bennington, Vt.

RIMBAUD'S ILLUMINATIONS

A Study by WALLACE FOWLIE

with his new translation and the French text of the poems

Mr. Fowlie says: "Rimbaud marks a central stage of development in the history of modern poetry between Nerval and Claudel, which is best described as a re-sanctification or re-spiritualization of human speech."

$4.00

GROVE PRESS

59 WEST 9 STREET, NEW YORK 11

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

available spring and summer . . .

POEMS FOR STUDY

By *Leonard Unger and William Van O'Connor, both of the University of Minnesota.* An anthology of English and American poems from Skelton to Spender which combines the historical and critical approaches to the study of poetry. Biographical facts and a critical discussion are furnished for each poet along with an analysis of one or more of his poems.

spring, prob. 640 pp. $4.50

THE ART OF THE NOVEL

By *Dorothy Van Ghent, University of Vermont.* A series of eighteen studies, each of which consists of (a) an essay on the book's general structure and (b) an extensive set of questions for use in class discussion.

summer, prob. 500 pp. $5.00

PROBLEMS OF AESTHETICS

By *Eliseo Vivas, Northwestern,* and *Murray Krieger, University of Minnesota.* A collection of contemporary selections on the philosophy of art which are grouped according to the basic problems of aesthetics.

spring, 640 pp. $6.00

just published

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

By *Philip Young.* This new addition to the Rinehart Critical Series organizes Hemingway's work in such a way that one can follow with new understanding the adventures of the "Hemingway hero" through the period of our half-century.

paper. 256 pp. $2.00

ESSAYS IN MODERN LITERARY CRITICISM

By *Ray B. West, Jr.* Presents influential critical documents since Coleridge, a section on modern critical theory, and a final one representing the practice of criticism of fiction, poetry and drama.

611 pages, $6.00

RINEHART & CO.

232 madison ave., n. y. 16

Notes on Contributors

BEN JOHNSON, a young American living in Rome, is the authorized translator of the work of ITALO SVEVO; he has recently collaborated with Giuseppe Berto on two art films.

VERNON WATKINS is the well-known British poet.

MARK SCHORER is in Italy on a Fulbright writing a book on D. H. Lawrence; his novel, *Myself My Friend,* will be published in the Autumn.

RICHARD WILBUR is working in Sandoval, New Mexico, on leave from Harvard as a Guggenheim Fellow.

WINTHROP PALMER'S book of verse, *The New Barbarian,* was published last year. She is on the staff of *Dance News,* and co-editor of the forthcoming *Dance News Annual.*

BEN REID is a young writer who teaches at Sweet Briar College. He has recently completed a book on Gertrude Stein.

SHIRLEY FREISINGER is working on an M.A. at Brooklyn College, and preparing a verse play based on Columbus' voyages.

MAC HAMMOND, a young poet, is a Teaching Fellow at Harvard.

The name of the distinguished British poet and critic, HERBERT READ, was included in the most recent royal Honors List; his *Philosophy of Modern Art* has just been published by Horizon Press, and a book of literary criticism, *The True Voice of Feeling,* is to be brought out this Spring by Pantheon.

MALCOLM M. ROSS is the author of *Milton's Royalism,* and of a forthcoming study of 17th Century poetic symbol to be called *Poetry and Dogma.*

MARVIN MUDRICK'S book, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery,* was published last year by the Princeton University Press. He is at present working on a critical study of Chaucer's poetry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hudson Review

EDITORS: *William Arrowsmith, Joseph Bennett, Frederick Morgan*
MANAGING EDITOR: *Lisa Dyer*

VOLUME VI, NUMBER 1 SPRING 1953

Father and Son (*story*)	ITALO SVEVO	5
The Death-Bell (*verse*)	VERNON WATKINS	27
Women in Love and Death	MARK SCHORER	34
Three Poems	RICHARD WILBUR	48
Two Poems	WILLIAM ALFRED	52
Three Poems	WINTHROP PALMER	54
Papa Haydn's Dead and Gone (*story*)	BEN REID	56
Three Poems	SHIRLEY FREISINGER	78
Five Poems for Pierre de Ronsard	RICHARD HOWARD	85
Two Poems	MAC HAMMOND	88
The True Voice of John Keats	HERBERT READ	90
A Note on the Metaphysicals	MALCOLM M. ROSS	106
Reviews:		
Perfection of the Life, or of the Work?	VIVIAN MERCIER	114
Chaucer and What We Make of Him	MARVIN MUDRICK	124
Six Poets	FREDERICK MORGAN	131
The Opera House of His Ego	ROBERT M. ADAMS	141
Eccentrics' Pilgrimage	R. W. B. LEWIS	144
The Servant's Looking-glass	HUGH KENNER	151
The Contradictions of S. Eisenstein	GEORGE BARBAROW	156

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 439 West Street, New York 14, N. Y. Subscriptions $3.50 per year in U. S. and Canada; foreign $4.00. Single copy, $1.00; in Canada, $1.15. U. S. distributor: B. de Boer, P. O. Box 761, Hoboken, N. J. Business and subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Rates in England: Subscriptions 25/ per year; single copy 7/6d. Distributor in France: Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne, 111 Rue Réaumur, Paris 2. Rates in France: Subscriptions 1200 fr. per year; single copy 400 fr. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright 1953 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Registered U. S. Patent Office. Entered as second class matter June 25, 1948 at the Post Office at New York, New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOLLINGEN SERIES
1953

XXXII AFRICAN FOLKTALES AND SCULPTURE

Folktales edited, with Introduction by Paul Radin in collaboration with Elinore Marvel. Sculpture selected with Introduction by James Johnson Sweeney. Native myths and folktales from what is possibly the most sophisticated of all aboriginal cultures, with 165 examples of plastic art from the same area. 7½" x 10", 335 pages of text, 165 plates. *$8.50*

XXXV CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND POETRY

The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts: Volume I. By Jacques Maritain. These lectures, on the distinction and the indissoluble connection between art and poetry, inaugurated the annual Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art in 1952.
7½" x 10", 500 pages, 65 illustrations and a frontispiece in color. *$6.50*

XXXVI EUROPEAN LITERATURE AND THE LATIN MIDDLE AGES

By Ernst Robert Curtius. This great study of the forms of medieval Latin literature is now available in English. 6" x 9", 650 pages. *$5.50*

XX PSYCHOLOGY AND ALCHEMY

By C. G. Jung. This, the first volume to appear in the Collected Works of Jung, has never previously been published in English. The work presents a seemingly forgotten relic of medieval superstition that provides an important clue to our understanding of contemporary psychology, and sets forth the author's views on the relations of psychology and religion.
6" x 9". 270 illustrations. 550 pages. *$5.00*

XXXIV WINDS

By St.-John Perse. The French text with a translation by Hugh Chisholm. An epic poem that Léon-Paul Fargue regarded as the opening of a new poetic country. Commentaries by Paul Claudel, Gaëtan Picon, Albert Béguin, and Gabriel Bounoure. 9" x 12". 256 pages. *$5.00*

DISTRIBUTED BY PANTHEON BOOKS, INC., 333 SIXTH AVE., N. Y. 14
For detailed catalogue write to Bollingen Series, 140 E. 62 St., N. Y. 21

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ITALO SVEVO

Father and Son[1]

My son Alfio arrived home after the war, a youngster of fifteen not at all like the child, so thin, pale, lanky, and careless of his dress, who had left. I at once noticed a streak of absent-mindedness in him, an inability to pursue today what he had begun yesterday: qualities which by and large I had known in myself, but of which I had been cured by the great holocaust. I had imagined that I would avoid lapsing into my father's weaknesses, that I would be capable of handling my own son differently. But my God! heaven forbid that such a son had been my father's! I was so much better equipped to cope with new situations than he had been, because of my cultivated tastes and active life; all the same, however, I was not sure how I should regard Alfio,—indeed, how I would manage to put up with him. I let him do completely as he wished. He quit the ginnasio directly after the Gentile Reform, which was not to his liking, and I did not say a single word against his doing it. I simply told him that he was losing an opportunity to acquire some sort of academic rank. I spoke in rather moving terms: I had pinned my hopes on him. He regarded this as gratuitous interference, informing me that there was not merely a difference in age between us, but much more. The war had separated us. We were now in a new world in which I, born long before the war, could not participate. Still it did seem to me that my position was such that I could understand the present-day world perfectly, and seeing that he considered me a nincompoop, I got angry.

If truth be told, arguments between us were fomented by others. Such an argument broke out one Sunday after dinner.

[1]At the time of his death at the age of sixty-seven Italo Svevo had all but finished a short novel entitled *A Short Sentimental Journey*, and was also in the midst of writing *The Oldster*, a sequel to *The Confessions of Zeno*, which was to treat the post-World War I fortunes and misfortunes of Zeno Cosini. In the Winter, 1952, issue of The Hudson Review a chapter from *The Oldster* was published, dealing with Zeno's liaison with a 24-year-old adventuress; in the present chapter he examines his more trying relations with his son.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We were all gathered together—my wife, my daughter Antonia, Valentino, and Carlo, the son of Ada and Guido, who, studying medicine at Bologna, was spending the holidays with us. Carlo started it by trying to talk Alfio out of quitting the liceo, asserting naively that ginnasio and liceo were a little dreary, but that, afterward, they rendered university life more enjoyable:

"You study," Carlo said, "but you never realize it."

I was a bit out of sorts. The vegetarian diet imposed on me by Dr. Raulli hits me especially hard on Sundays, when I see choice pieces of chicken being wolfed by everybody around me. But I am certain of not having injected into the conversation the bitter tone of a martyr. I was the mildest one of all. Except that it was impossible for me to rebuff my many allies: all those who were eager to keep Alfio on the track I wanted for him, but which I could not keep him on unaided.

Valentino, a bureaucrat who thought that everything under the sun could be proved, and that directly a reckoning had been made one had solved all—Valentino immediately showed himself overly aggressive. He said that every man had to be prepared to make sacrifices for the good of his future, his dignity, his family. It was so; there was no question about it. Whoever could not submit to such sacrifice would afterward regret it. Having frequently witnessed it, he knew it to be true. But he was not speaking from personal experience, because he had seen things clearly from the very beginning, from early youth he had done all that might make his future secure.

Carlo needled Valentino a little:

"Somewhere in the world, of course, it must be possible to find people who, rather than considering the future, prefer the present. Grammatically speaking, these are two equally important tenses. One is free to select one or the other."

It was a joke, but I think that it poisoned the discussion. Alfio did not side with Carlo, with whom he had little in common; instead, lashing out at Valentino, he sought to alienate himself all the more:

"Everybody can't know everything. One thing is clear, and that is that an office functionary isn't capable of understanding an artist—and neither is a doctor."

Carlo had inherited a great many of his father's weak points,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though not that lack of humor which ruined him; like his father, he would have been capable of making out the most ridiculous balance-sheets without cracking a smile; now, however, he was able to lift a glass to his lips and coolly extricate himself:

"The only thing, of course, we doctors can know about artists are the cases of apoplexy which occasionally strike them. It's true that then, finally, they aren't artists any longer and are in no position to pester people."

Valentino kept quiet. He was a timid soul. He had been occupied with my accounts for some time now, and went so far as to believe that he had been delegated to see that everything went well in my family. He had deceived himself, and was very much inclined to retreat after making one lukewarm protest to Alfio:

"I can only give you advice suggested by my own experience."

But Antonia was terrible. As a rule she was rather motherly toward Alfio, but now she was witnessing an attack by him on her husband. She felt that even Carlo's superficial levity in approaching the matter to which Valentino had devoted himself with such solemnity was a show of contempt for her husband. She became violent, rebuking me for letting my son behave like a fool (—I raised my arms as though imploring God for help), and she scolded Alfio for believing himself superior to anyone anywhere: it was a presumptuous attitude for which he would sooner or later repent. Why didn't he at least want to complete his middle studies? He would be inferior to everybody for the rest of his life! Moreover, when he found someone willing to give him good advice, he could not and should not reply like a country bumpkin!

And the upshot of all this, wherein I figured no more than cabbage at an afternoon tea, was an ill will on the part of Alfio for me. It is quite true that I could see no way to support him; rather, I saw no way to avoid siding with the others. By God! it's a serious thing to see one's own son renounce at the very outset the course which others take if they have the means. I could not, however, run the risk of aggravating Valentino's situation, for it was already very distressing to Antonia. For years I had been resolved to act in such a way that there would not be a repetition for my son and me of the relations that had existed between me and my father; but everything now pointed toward

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just that. I had behaved in such a way as to eliminate between us any excessive manifestations of affection, like my father's grieved anxiety for my future as he died, at a moment when he was already suffering enormously. His anxiety then was the equivalent of an impassioned kiss which afterwards, certainly, provoked my long and painful malady—a malady which, even after it was cured, caused me to see the sun less clearly and feel the atmosphere stuffy.

To that end, I had resolved to avoid both great effusions of affection between my son and myself, and, in so far as possible, the strictures of a patriarch. The effusions were avoided with consummate ease when he was in swaddling clothes, because I was not able to bear the unseemly squalling of children. As for the patriarchal strictures, they could not be entirely averted. Whenever Augusta was fed up and called on me for help I would intervene with a great roar that put an end to all shilly-shally. But I was brief with it, turning on him or his sister indiscriminately, like a general chewing out an army corps, and, with a single witty word, promptly dispelling, and making apparent my lack of, ill feeling. And I always abstained religiously from demanding of them acts of contrition. With Antonia, I am sure I was successful: she will be able, in complete serenity, to see me die, and will carry on her life side by side with her husband and son as though I had never lived. And once a year she will cheerfully come bearing flowers to my grave, knowing within herself that she is giving me a pleasure that is my full due.

But with Alfio I am less sure. I know that he does not think very highly of me. For him—the artist—an upright merchant is not worthy of consideration. Judgments of this sort are precisely those that death ultimately rectifies. And yet, whereas it would have been so easy to come to an understanding with my father, with whom I lived alone—the complications could not have been so great because they arose just between him and me—here a crowd of persons intrudes and obscures rapport between us. To cite a single instance, we may return to that Sunday discussion. At one point I raised my arms in a gesture which like no other is that of the patriarch, and I did it to calm down Antonia. At the time I had no idea how I might go about letting my son stand on his own feet; I had intruded with an admonish-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment, which I justified by my affection for him, though it was out of regard for Valentino.

Alfio, briefly, is a young fellow who is considerably more difficult for me than I ever was for my father. My father used to scold me for laughing at everything, and my son also scolds me for the same reason. Apart from the bitterness this like-mindedness engenders in me, his strictures are much more severe than were my father's, for my father's used really to make me laugh: those of my son are downright hard, efficient. I make myself look serious, and whenever a freakish thought comes to mind I do my best to squelch it. It vanishes, and afterwards I look back upon it with regret. Freakish thoughts, if not given expression, lose all efficacy, and life slips along more monotonous and sad than ever.

I actually believe that my son is cross with me, and with his mother too. At every little difference between us a creak of resentment can be heard in that somewhat feeble voice of his. Right after the war he was put out with us in the name of Communism. He was not at all a Communist, but he really felt that we were a bunch of no-goods because we were taking up so much room in the world—so many rooms in our house, he meant—and because we were sequestering a patrimony large enough to support a great many others. Augusta shuddered every time she thought that he might show up at the house with new lodgers. But in all the world he did not know a single workman. He walked the streets alone at that time, concerned with social justice; and then, shortly thereafter, with the bearing of an artist —of a personality.

And it was then that I laughed at him a little, and that was a mistake. We talked only in theories since he had not yet started to paint. This business of being a personality seemed to me carrying things too far: presumptuous of him. One had to aim at having a personality that was affable, for instance, or seductive. But personality by itself—! Sometimes real personalities wound up with prison sentences. "What a personality!" I would say, speaking of our Giacomo, a night watchman we hired to guard the villa during the recent periods of unsettlement. All in all, Giacomo was a real personality. When plied with wine he was brutish as a drunk, but he could not force himself into any heroic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make-believe: he looked a brute but not a drunk. He did not stagger, and his gait was the same, a trifle stiff, but he could walk a straight line. I steadfastly refused to fire him. He did his duty, always awake. Anyway, he never had anything to do, and he left us to sleep in peace because nothing out of the ordinary ever happened. A real personality, our Giacomo!

But Alfio got angry and, as usual, trying to explain himself more clearly, insulted me. I became a bit savage, and threatened to disinherit him. The argument ran on for a good many days, and more than once Augusta came running to one or the other of us to explain things, to soothe our tempers, to have us make peace. My anger had already passed when, to please his mother, he finally asked me to forgive him, but he himself never really forgave *me*. To tell the truth, I am always very busy; I would not have given the matter a second thought, except that I was sorry to notice that he was ill at ease whenever he saw me. At the thought that death, which was gradually pressing upon me, might affect his youth as my father's death had cast a shadow across my own, I began to feel sorry for Alfio. I felt sorry for myself too, however—my only son would breathe a sigh of relief when I died and say: "Uff!" And Alfio's was a sincerity so radical as to call forth a distinct word. I should have liked to die pitied, wanting the pity, however, to be tempered with moderation.

Augusta informed me that Alfio had become addicted to painting in solitude. He would leave the house in the morning with his portfolio and tempera paints under his arm. He carried along with him something to eat. He did not have anyone instructing him for fear that a teacher might somehow cripple his personality. Dead tired, he would return home after sundown. Even so, he would go out again to talk shop with friends of his at the café. From me he had inherited only this part of his day. The rest was not mine; it had belonged neither to the grandfather I had given him nor to his grandmother. Where, then, had he acquired his itch for painting, his solitude?—His personality? I, who had striven in vain to be like other men, had never thought of it. His rebelliousness? Whenever I felt such an impulse I repented at once. And his grandfather did not even know what it was; big and fat, his grandfather Giovanni had no trouble passing the buck to others. Innate rebelliousness in a person, as in Alfio's case, is a sure sign of weakness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And even his body has a design of its own, because none of his forebears had one like it. He is long and lanky; his body makes a peculiar line that runs up his slightly concave trunk, changing its mind farther up and bending forward again in a bulbous curve that is not quite a hunch; his head cranes so that it is never perfectly straight, and, in order to look anyone his own height in the face, he has to roll his eyes upwards. He is not good-looking. I know because others have told me so. But Augusta and I admire his pale, sweet features. There is a vast difference between knowing an individual intimately and seeing him pass once along the street with all of his imperfections on display. We know Alfio's points of strength and his weaknesses. His long legs carry more than the forms of his body. And I often used to talk with Augusta about the magnificent expression in Alfio's bright blue eyes, one of which was a little crossed (but not so much as his mother's) —his pitiable blue eyes pleading for succor and support, his cross-eyes straining to see even when his mouth was pronouncing tough words lifted from books by Marx which he had not read and in which he did not believe.

I felt myself called upon to make peace with him. A day came when I was feeling worse than usual: I was threatened by a stroke—one of those visitations that take away one's speech, hearing, sight, one's very life. The stroke announced itself with noises in my ears. And considering that I had once had a blood pressure of 240 mm.—! I was profoundly touched, visualizing Alfio before my dead body sobbing, as I had done at his age: "Now . . . from now on . . . life for me is finished."

That evening, as soon as I knew he was home and dressing to go out to the coffehouse, I went to his room. He had a little study on the other side of the house; the light there was poor, but Augusta had arranged it attractively.

"May I?" I asked, hesitating after I had half-opened the door. I saw Alfio, his eyes turned upwards at himself, standing in front of the mirror knotting his tie. It is a great sign of sincerity, this looking at oneself the way one looks at others.

He turned toward me, his tie dangling from his wilted shirt. He seemed taken aback, concerned:

"You troubled yourself to come, Papa? You might have called me, you know."

Relieved, I started to laugh:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This is a business matter; it's better we talk alone. . . . Your mother tells me that you finish a picture a day. Do you think I might have one?"

He looked at me quizzically, shy with his ever supplicating eyes:

"But Father! my art isn't for everybody. It's something new. It's got to be understood first. And since it is new, it's unpolished; it's a collection of virtually untutored brushstrokes springing from impressions I've had."

"What difference does that make to me?" I laughed. "You can buy art whether it's old or new. It's produced to be sold. Sell me one of your pieces. I'll be your first customer."

He seemed about to protest; but instead, after thinking it over a moment, agreed. Then, shyly, he said a word which must have been a price.

"How much?" I demanded, my voice rising a little.

He looked at me hesitantly, red to the ears. I realized that he thought I wanted to bargain with him. This really frightened me. What if he were to reduce his price just to please me and I then be forced to bear his consequent natural resentment? How does one go about making peace?

I implored him:

"I'm an old man and I don't hear well. Tell me how much you want. I'll pay anything you ask so as to bring myself closer to you, closer to your art. I'll hang your piece on the wall in my study and I'll look at it every day. In the end I'll understand it, too. I'm less a fool than you take me for. I'm an old man: that, of course. But my age indicates that I've had some experience. It's true that I've never been concerned with painting. But music now—— Recently I've even reached the point of being able to put up with Debussy. Not liking him, you understand, because his music sounds to me like things that were recently blown up by a bomb: there's smoke, but that's all the fragments have in common."

His deciding to please me was due, I think, to my double talk about Debussy.

Resolute, he named his price: eight hundred lire.

I took a thousand-note out of my pocket and with the air of a punctilious businessman said:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You owe me two hundred." Then, feigning slight impatience: "And the painting . . . ?"

He gave me the two hundred lire. Where money is concerned, I know, his sense of scruple is one that does not tally with his unseemly notions about wealth. In this respect he is by far my superior, and this superiority of his, so much admired by his mother, is a delight to me. He does not spend in a manner that would bring him closer to his poor fellow creatures; rather, he keeps his billfold well lined, which, it would seem, broadens the gulf between him and them.

As for the painting itself, he had not yet given it to me. I would have it in ten minutes. He wanted to give me the best he had. Out of shame, apparently, he did not want to let me see the results of his ineptitude.

I stepped to the doorway, but presently came in again.

"Look," I began, "you and I are alone in the world." I caught myself, terrified at having said the very same thing which, with considerably more truth, had been said by my father, and I corrected myself. "I mean, we're the only men of the same blood in this house. Why shouldn't we be able to understand each other? I'm going to exert every effort to bring myself closer to you. Want to follow my example? I can't teach you anything any more, and I don't want to seem like a tutor. I'm too old to teach and you're too old to learn. You have your own personality and you have to do your best to assert it."

I kissed him on the cheek and, flustered, he kissed the air.

"Yes, Papa," he said, moved.

I started for the door cheerfully:

"You've got to bring some tacks so that your painting can be put on the wall straight away. I'm not so good at things like that, you know."

"But a painting has to have a frame," he said. "I'll buy one myself tomorrow. . . . A modest little frame for a modest little painting."

"All right," I said; "but in the meantime, right now, I want to begin studying your work. You'll know how to fix it up without damaging it."

In the ten minutes I spent waiting for Alfio I was very nervous. It struck me that I had succeeded in doing something tremendous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—something important for me, for him, and for the family. And it also occurred to me that my father would not have been capable of bringing it off. Still, between him and me there had not been the Great War. The War?—damn the War! It was merely a question of intelligence: knowing how to reach forward into another generation.

But the War was recalled to mind when I got a look at the painting—a small square sheet of paper. I first saw it over Alfio's shoulder as he busied himself tacking it onto the wall.

"Thanks, thanks ever so much," I said.

He stood and gazed at it admiringly. I aped his pose. Then he left in that slouchy way of his.

Returning to the painting, I thought *He's swindled me! He's given me the worst of his works!* It is not at all unpleasant, discovering a shrewd businessman in one's own son. I was not complaining.

At first, that splotch of his in front of me made me uneasy. Before seeing it I had asked Alfio to hang it so that I could look at it when I was seated at my writing-table. In this respect he was exceptionally shrewd: not only could I see it when I was sitting down, but also when I sat reading with the lamp at my back, and even when I stretched out on the couch to rest, if I did not lie on my left side—something I could stand no more than my father —with my nose mashed against the wall. But even then I could feel the presence of that monstrosity in the room.

The more I regarded the painting, the more I became convinced that, because of my sage equilibrium, I was quite an exception in my family (composed of me, my father, and my son).

The picture could not be removed without my running the risk of offending Alfio all over again. The frame arrived and the picture stayed where it was despite my timid proposal to move it—so that it might better avail itself of the light. With an air of competence, Alfio declared that it belonged just where it was. He gazed at it once again, affectionately, admiring it in the isolation in which the frame had put it, and then left.

The frame, naturally, was like a commentary. It is a belief of mine that whenever a thing is framed it acquires new value. A thing should be isolated, because it then becomes something on its own. Unframed, it is overshadowed by whatever is around it. Even Alfio's picture became something. I looked at it first with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anger; then as I began to see what he had tried to do, with pleasure; and finally with admiration, when I suddenly discovered that he had actually done something.

It had been apparent all along that Alfio had wanted to paint a hill. There was no doubt about that. The colors had not been varied to indicate either distance or height, but when I came to understand and like the painting I arrived at conclusions that really changed the entire aspect of the atmosphere about me. On top of the hill there had been constructed (or at least it had been his intention to construct) three parallel rows of houses. And studying it, I had the pleasant feeling of actively collaborating with Alfio. I was painting, myself! At the bottom, some purple strokes marked a roadway. It was not the usual color for earth. All the same, it was easy enough to make out that it must have been earth. Above it stood the first row of buildings: a long low wall painted yellow with a lone house on one side, the upper part of the house painted yellow as well, the bottom left bare, in white, the color of the paper. But this house was the most habitable of them all. Its walls were absolutely perpendicular, perfectly square, the only defect being that they did not have enough windows—two on the second floor and only one on the first; but they had been fitted out with matching grey persiennes which I really came to like, later. This was undoubtedly a manor house.

On the far side of the first row there were some more purplish brushstrokes which, as one gathered from the key provided by the picture, again indicated a road. And then there were two more rows of houses separated by the same purplish color which, due to the distance—that is, so that it could be seen better—was darker. But my God, what houses! They had been painted with all the compassion of a poet for poor, ramshackle dwellings: with a deep lament. Nearly all of the walls were upright, but the houses lacked windows; that is, wherever they had them they were decidedly black and shapeless, simply to make it evident that these poor windows had neither persiennes nor panes. Instead of light shattering down from without, dingy gloom issued from within.

One can scarcely imagine how easy a thing it is to accustom oneself to everything under the sun. I, for instance, took a fancy to that picture, and whenever I glanced up from my book (I had resumed my study of philosophy and was reading Nietzsche) I felt a genuine pleasure at finding myself vis-à-vis with that syn-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thesis of life as Alfio had felt it. I filled the houses with people. In the manor house I installed some landlords who, rude as their dwelling, were exploiting the inhabitants of the black-windowed houses. Only, in the background, a considerable distance away, at the top, there was another well-constructed, square-shaped house; it had black windows, but it may have been another manor. It led me to think that with two such houses, the lot of the others was worsening. Poor, long-suffering little houses, ramshackle harbors of sorrow! And there were even signs that these houses of the poor might become still more numerous: there were some little towers scattered about which in time might be used as dwellings.

My relations with Alfio during this period were very pleasant. My admiration for him was sincere. The way, by simply painting persiennes onto a house, he had led me to visualize an entire landscape! His was truly art. Modern art. And, understanding it, I grew younger.

I talked to him about it with deep satisfaction. And he listened to me, but with characteristic youthful vigor would interrupt my praise, thereby letting it go to waste: the earth seen from a certain point at a certain hour actually was that color, and it did not take daring—rather, the analytical eye of a painter—to recognize it.

"Take a look, take a better look," he suggested.

Eager to resume my own analysis, I mentioned his constructions which, though not yet houses, were in a state of becoming.

He protested, laughing:

"But those *are* houses—real houses; you only have to look at them to tell. You simply have to know *how* to look. You've got to remember that light not only reveals but sometimes conceals and obscures things. Look at that house you claim isn't one yet; note the faint brown mark indicating a window. . . ."

To me, his picture was easier to put up with than his talk about it. I continued to enjoy looking at it; but when we talked about it, not caring to state exactly what I was thinking, I fell back upon some of Alfio's expressions. Be that as it may, I eventually reached a point of being able to roam that landscape of his with such confidence that I never had to worry about getting lost. And this pleasant period in my relations with Alfio lasted for some time. Though I was a bit disturbed, one day, by Alfio's wanting to present me with another of his pictures—one I did not want to hang on the wall in my room. I put it in a drawer,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assuring him that I looked at it every day. I was lying, but I could not waste my time peopling the rickety houses of my son. Then too, any great concern on my part was pointless since I had forbidden myself to speak my mind and was, instead, obliged to repeat things Alfio had said. It was easier, therefore, simply not to look at his paintings.

This blissful interlude ended abruptly. At a very happy moment: precisely when I would have least expected it. I had invited an old friend of mine named Cima to lunch. It had been roughly a half-century since I had last seen him. Such get-togethers in one's old age are like the words in a book which have been *printed in italics: they stand out in a very special way.* For a variety of reasons I had never forgotten Cima. He was a wealthy landowner from southern Italy who had come to Trieste in his youth to study German. Back in those days they made that kind of mistake in southern Italy: Cima learned Triestine with ease, later spending his days wenching, hunting, and fishing. He was richer then than he ever was again in his life.

I could not possibly have forgotten him because he had symbolized for me a number of failures, but a success, too. And I, judging my life and trying to be scrupulously objective, forgot neither.

My success was one of observation.

At the time, I was studying political economy. Or rather, it was a period when I was studying law, but my enthusiasm had led me to study too much political economy, which should have remained no more than a side study.

This country gentleman was obviously an absentee landowner, of the sort so excellently portrayed in the textbooks. And one day I was present when Orazio received a letter from his steward.

"From my overseer," he mumbled. (Even now, as an old man, he mumbles his thoughts aloud, no doubt to help set in motion his clear but slow-moving brain.) Then, after having read the letter, he murmured: "No."

And I said to him:

"I'll bet your steward is suggesting some improvements you refuse to make."

His surprise confirmed it. "How did you know?"

I was able to point out to him the exact passage in the textbook which had told me.

My failures are so numerous that I can scarcely be expected

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to remember them all. Once I got him to join me in renouncing tobacco. Naturally, I at once reneged. He, on the contrary, in the course of a week underwent every hunting adventure conceivable, both good and bad, without weakening. One day he tramped the Carso for ten hours with no luck at all, and the next day he bagged so much that he had to return to town to keep from overburdening himself, and his vow not to smoke remained firm. This surprised me, inasmuch as I kept saying that I could not bring myself to give up smoking because any resolution I made would weaken upon receipt of good news, bad news, or no news at all.

He was possessed of will power that resembled inertia—something innate in him rather like the volition of the water spilling down the mountainside. When confronted by a wish, if it did not coincide with his own, he played deaf. Once—I remember it as though it happened to me yesterday, because moments of towering anger are never forgotten—I was expected at six o'clock by a woman who was able to squeeze in only one hour's time for me. At three o'clock I made the mistake of getting into a chaise he was driving and letting him take me to Lipizza. I know that it was a magnificent, clear autumn day, but I remember it as dark and wrathful.

Up till a certain hour we could have arrived back in Trieste in a leisurely fashion; but despite my admonitions, he took me on a drive through the Carso, about which I knew so little that I thought we were approaching Trieste. When we arrived in town I found myself, torn with craving and remorse, standing in the middle of the piazza where he dropped me. And completely innocent, Orazio was saying to me:

"You should have told me when we left."

I *had* told him! But it was one of those things to which he was deaf. It had all happened, as I later found out, because his veterinarian had told him that his horse had to put in a certain number of kilometers per day.

And now that he had returned to Trieste, he was glumly asserting that after having lived so long and experienced so much sorrow, he was utterly without will. For my part, I declared that I was no longer the spineless man he had once known. What he told me, however, was hard to believe, because that very day I sensed that I was returning to Lipizza with him—but with me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doing the trotting instead of being carried along by a horse: he wanted me to accompany him everywhere he went.

"Afterwards I'll walk you home", he said.

As it turned out, we went to an insurance company where he had to fill out a declaration stating that he had changed his address, thence to a shipping agent who still had some of his furniture in storage, and finally he inflicted old man Ducci on me.

Like myself, old man Ducci had remained in Trieste, but from the day we left school, at the age of eighteen, we had not exchanged a single word. I recalled that the last time I had talked to him he told me that he was toying with the idea of going to seek his fortune in Japan. Afterward, small as our town is, we saw each other at least once a week and waved without one of us ever saying a word to the other. With the passing of years our waves became gradually more cordial. The fact that we were the only persons in the city who had known each other for so long created something of an intimacy between us. And since he had found his fortune in Trieste, I regarded it as only natural that he had given up the idea of going to Japan. Now here we were, all three of us together, pounding the pavement with our accumulation of nearly two centuries' living. Our eyes a little glassy, we looked at one another sympathetically, and for a moment I forgot my impatience. But it returned when I learned that Ducci could not recollect ever having had the intention of going to Japan. Great God!—my whole world is becoming topsy-turvy: for years whenever I saw him I used to think *There's a man who nearly went to Japan!* Could I have made an error? could it have been someone else who had told me fifty years before that he wanted to emigrate? But later, seeing Ducci on other occasions while Cima was in town, I discovered that he was planning a number of grand tours. For instance, he had a hankering to go to Norway. Certainly, contemplating so many trips, it was quite possible that fifty years hence he might even forget having wanted to go to Norway; whereas I, who avoid making plans because they leave me with a feeling of unrest, might, were I to live, remember the astonishing one he had made.

Anyway, the first time Cima came to lunch at our house he told an old story, one dating back to our youth, and not all of which he remembered, but which I finished for him. We split our sides laughing over it, and in our abandon the story led me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to hurt poor Alfio's feelings in a thoroughly irreparable manner.

It must be remembered that when young Cima arrived in Trieste I was casting about for some examples of strong will and resolution to help me overcome the spinelessness from which I had begun to suffer. Where could I find a better example than in Cima?—he always had the bearing of a lord wherever he went and, though less intelligent than I, knew no embarrassment or doubt: he was a man from whom I could learn. Of course, with his little imperial and black eyes and great head of curly hair, he also bore an air of youth and of strength. I could scarcely imitate his good looks and strength; but I doubt that his ascendancy depended upon those things, that they gave him his great tranquility, his sureness and joy. He was master because he felt himself so.

It struck me that the practice of killing animals must have contributed toward creating strength in Cima. This was really my weakness—my greatest—, that of not being able to kill animals. My squeamishness reached the point—I quite remember it since there is something similar, something related to it, I even feel nowadays—that once, one evening before going to bed, I went so far as to give a light swat to a fly that was pestering me. Crippled, the poor thing managed to get away from me, and wanting to put it out of its misery I looked for it in vain. I could not find it, and time and again throughout the night I thought of it, in undoubted agony, in some out-of-the-way corner of the room, consumed by rancor and pain. Then, guided by Cima, I resolved to accustom myself to such pangs of remorse. I made the heavy payment for a hunting license and one of the fine outfits, plumed hat and all, they used to wear in those days. And Cima lent me a double-barreled shotgun.

It began with a hunting trip in the swamps. We went out to the marshland around Cervignano. On the way out I tried to fill my heart with hatred for animals. Actually, those birds I was going out to kill were predatory too. They lived on animals smaller than themselves. Not only that, it was said that when they encountered a dangerous animal they were capable of carrying it up into the air and dropping it to its death. Later I discovered that if I killed a wood creature I was still better off than Cima who, like a blooded hunting dog, did not eat wild animals. I at least could stifle my remorse with a savory meal. Still, I was very much on edge, and my first act of violence against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

animals seemed so important to me that I smoked a good many cigarettes, telling myself that once I possessed a powerful will—the powerful will of an assassin—I would stop smoking.

(I meant to give an account of happenings a few weeks old, but I find myself deep in the past. Distant things assume vast significance when compared with those a few weeks old. The bouquet of a well-blended old wine, which everyone can recognize as soon as it is lifted to the nose. And yet, my wife here claims that I don't remember anything. Naturally, were I to be asked where I left my gold pen or my glasses, it would surprise me to be expected to make such an effort; but bygone things come crowding back unassisted, embellished with all of their particulars.)

So there we were in the swamp, in the mud, hiding in casks not far from each other. Orazio had urged me to keep quiet and not to move, because of the sacrifice we were making by remaining so many hours in the damp of those hogsheads in order to outwit the birds—suspicious creatures that, long before taking to flight, examined their projected routes with tiny but very sharp eyes. Another reason to hate them: undue prudence. Up over the distant mountains it looked as if the sky was beginning to grow light. Dawn? I was growing restless. Slow operations wear my patience. But how could I speed things up, crouching as I was in such an uncomfortable place? That Cima! He might have got us larger casks so that we at least could have put seats inside. I tried to look at my watch. It was a way to make the time pass more quickly. But the accumulated glow of the motionless stars above—an enormous example of patience!—was not sufficient to light the tiny dial. And something occurred to me: I might stop smoking at that unknown hour. This was a brand-new resolution; it would be harder to break too: there would be no more calculations, no more time limits. I would be starting out at some unknown hour, advancing far into the future to another.

I studied the direction of the wind and leaned against the side of the barrel facing into it. With a feeling of self-control, I struck a sulphur match.

Whereupon an incredible thing happened. Cima fired at me. I heard the whistle of buckshot pass my ears. I was filled with towering indignation. In those days my indignation was turned against anybody who tried to prevent me from smoking my last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cigarette. It can just be imagined how I felt encountering this kind of interference! I didn't think twice. Instead of replying to the insolent words with which Cima was now lashing me, I yelled:

"I'll kill you!"

I aimed the gun at him and fired.

"You fool," Cima shouted, "what do you think you're doing?"

"What do you think *you're* doing?" I retorted.

"But I know how to shoot."

"Sure, but if I hadn't ducked in time I'd have had an earful of buckshot."

"Look, I've got a hole in my hat."

He jumped out of his blind and brought it over to show me. I was sorry. I could have said that I had aimed at his hat and not his head, but he would not have believed me.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but you got me angry."

His eye fell regretfully across the broad marshland, and he walked away.

"You can stay," I said, sulking, smoking furiously, "*I'll* go."

"Where?" he said, lighting a cigarette himself. "By now all the birds around know we've got guns over here. Besides, you don't know how to get out of the swamp. Look at yourself—you're in the mud up to your knees."

He turned around and started off.

It was his way of making me tag along behind him. I tried not to obey. But I was really running the risk of drowning. I struggled up out of the mud to the path he had taken. I had no alternative but to resign myself, for the last time, to submission. But I made a vow: in future, whenever he went to the Boschetto I was going to Servola. There was solid ground there.

We walked for ten minutes. Then, suddenly, he stopped and broke into laughter:

"You're quite a character!" Then he almost buckled over, he was laughing so. He managed to stammer out a few words: "I shoot . . . you shoot . . . just as if you thought it was the same thing. . . ." And after lighting a tallow match: "And now you're angry with me."

He took hold of my arm and stroked it. And finally I was laughing along with him. It would have been silly to give up smoking not knowing the hour.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A hearty laugh, now—there's something that's never without profit! So alive was that laugh that we found it again completely intact; indeed, bigger. My friend I found meek, less dangerous—a slender, little old man, his body ever erect, but not from innate vigor because, weak and wispy as it was, no strength was required to hold it up as long as no one shoved it over accidentally; his head still partially covered with (white) hair—much better off than I was—, but by no means enough to hide the reddishness of his scalp underneath. Of course, I no longer paid him the attention accorded the model and teacher he had been in my youth: now, really, he was a teacher with nothing more to teach and could feel content at being treated as an equal. We laughed over the absurdity of my having wanted to go hunting, and then over his having taken me. Next, because Augusta raised the subject of my prolonged drives to wean myself away from smoking, we laughed simply at the fool in me. There was praise for me in the end, agreement that the disease was cured, since I never mentioned it, though I went right on smoking—naturally! I had even had to force the disease not to manifest itself, except in soliloquies that were immediately forgotten, and in resolutions that were neither written nor spoken nor in any way indicated on the calendar or the face of my watch:—all of which left me in a rather pleasant state of freedom. By Jove, living so long cures all diseases!

During that lunch now, I had not drunk a thing; I had even abstained from tasting any of the delectable meat that everyone else was eating. Nothing had been introduced into my impoverished blood stream that might have heated it. It was boiling simply from laughter. I was laughing at myself: having gone out to kill birds, I had proved such a marksman that I had not managed to hit Cima with a single buckshot. Then, to needle Cima, I corrected myself: I had left to shoot birds and a bird ended by firing at me. For his part, Cima dredged up something I did not recall, which everyone except me laughed at, because it was so humorless a thing that I would have had to tickle myself in order to laugh. But there was no resentment between us. Only, as was natural, the laughing stopped, whereas I should have liked for it to continue. It was healthy exercise, and of violent exercises the only one old men are permitted.

And to prolong it, I began to talk about Alfio's painting—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something I had laughed bitterly over in the past, and over which I then smiled because of my effort to insert all the things that were missing from that picture of his which, though I had finally come to like it, I never ceased to laugh at. At that time there was a great deal of talk about earthquakes, and exploding into a whoop of laughter, I told how I had gone running to the painting to see if the little houses had all collapsed:

"No, they hadn't. They seemed to be in shambles, but they were exactly as before."

Not even the sudden draining-away of color from the already white face of Alfio could restrain me. My attack had come so without warning that he had only glanced up from his plate a little, staring me in the face with those gentle eyes of his, scrutinizing me to see if under the surface derision there might be an entirely different meaning. I did not understand anything. I considered myself innocent. I needed to laugh, and to this end any subject was a good subject.

But Alfio let fly with:

"Listen, if you wish, I'll return you the money you gave me and take back my painting."

But I objected:

"And who's going to pay me for all the work I put into it?"

And since Cima, with that slow-motion brain of his, did not understand what I meant, I explained that with great effort and perseverance I had completed and populated my son's houses, and that now that they were straightened out I did not feel like giving them back. Now—completed by me—I liked the picture. And just as soon as I found myself in full possession of my health (for a month now, with this in view, I have been taking a tonic), I was going to take on another of his pictures—one I had put away lest I strain myself.

Alfio tried heckling me:

"Do you know, what you have to strain yourself to understand, other people, who are better prepared in art than you, do without any effort at all simply by looking, the way one looks at nature itself?"

Denying that my effort was due to any shortcomng of mine, I got angry. I got so angry, in fact, that I forgot my iron resolve and called Alfio a fool. I am sorry and ashamed of it. How strange are the relations between fathers and sons!—No amount of trying serves to make them better. I, who had always claimed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to know nothing of painting, was up in arms because my son was shouting aloud that he agreed.

But the others behaved even worse. Putting on the insouciance of a faithful administrator, Valentino said:

"It's clear that an artist isn't on the right track if he doesn't please very many people."

Alfio thought so little of Valentino's judgment that he did not even bother to answer. But Antonia, distressed at her husband's interference on this second occasion, after he had limped away from the first encounter, tugged at his sleeve to warn him of the danger. Paying scarcely any attention to her, Valentino straightened his jacket, examining it with curiosity because it was pulling. And after a brief pause Alfio said to his sister:

"Let him talk. What's the difference?"

A fresh offense, with another and more serious one following close at its heels: after lunch Orazio wanted to see the painting; whereupon Alfio declared that he had no intention of assisting at such an examination, and went to his room. But he was afterwards unable to quench his curiosity, and just when Orazio, who was standing before the pieces, started guffawing, holding that non-existent stomach of his, Alfio appeared in the doorway of my study, leaned against the jamb, and looked on intently, not in the least in sympathy with the laughter, but so well possessed that he did not seem hurt.

"Houses on horseback!" Orazio said, and did, in fact, discover something that looked like the muzzle of a horse under one of the houses.

It was from that day, I rather feel, that my relations with Alfio began to deteriorate. I did everything I could to improve them. Only, I could not tell him that I liked his painting. I was a boor in his eyes, though only where painting was concerned. I could scarcely say to him: "Yes, I'm a boor, though only where painting is concerned." I courted him, I gave him money, I put my arm around him, I bussed him any number of times on the cheek while he kissed the air. It all came to naught, because I never again dared to talk to him about painting.

One day I met him as he was returning home with his little box and portfolio. "Has your painting gone well?" I asked.

"I do what I can." And he hurried off. He was really frightened that I might ask him to let me see some of his work.

Enduring his behavior looked to be a difficult task. All the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theories I had formulated from my dealings with my father could be of no service because with my father I had acted altogether differently. Still, I continued to be kind to him, polite. At table whenever there was a discussion I always sided with Alfio. When he asked me for money I gave it to him without batting an eye. I used nothing but kind words when I talked to him. My attitude, of course, must have been a strange, a not really affectionate one. And betweenwhiles, while I held my arm around him, something within me was saying *My, what a good man I am! what a good man!* This feeling, that we are good, is apt to make us less good.

What is more, I think that better relations were not restored because actually he attached slight importance to the way he got on with me. Time and again I had begged him to keep me company, and he bolted as soon as he could.

Now he was developing warm friendships, first one, then another, among his colleagues. For a while he concentrated his entire affection on a painter who made really beautiful portraits. And I remarked testily:

"Aha! then things can also be painted the way they are?"

Alfio turned pale the way he knows how and answered:

"Everyone has his own personality."

To him—that is, to us—had fallen the deranged personality of disorganized colors. There was nothing to do but grin and bear it. He always got his revenge.

Thus I was forced to conclude that if my anguish and death resulted as great punishment for Alfio, he was fully deserving of it. I might start toward death, now, with great tranquility. Death was a visitation we might all expect, and I had to get used to the idea. I had a number of good reasons for believing that even its consequences would not be unduly serious: Augusta would have cried over me without going to pieces, Antonia would not have cried at all, and Alfio might have reacted the way I had once, or completely otherwise—which would have been exactly the same for me.

[*Translated from the Italian by Ben Johnson*]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERNON WATKINS

The Death-Bell

"It tolls for *thee.*"—Donne

Hold fast the impatient bell
And let my soul have time
To count and ponder well
What steps he has to climb
To see what Simeon saw
And those three travelled kings,
Love that fulfils the law
Figured in limbs, not wings;
Whose hands uphold the throne
By that last promise given
That before day was gone
He'ld be with Him in heaven.
Pause, while I set my prayer
Against contending lust;
Then, on the doubting air
Give tongue, majestic dust.

For this bell tolls to birth
Him who hears: 'I, if I
Be lifted up from earth,
Will draw men unto Me.'
There in one height are met
Old age and swaddling-bands.
Before his life had set,
Simeon in his two hands
Caught up the babe, and praised
God, to a hidden lyre.
Love's resurrection blazed,
Changing, as by a fire,
All tongues to his true song.
That Pentecostal gust
Now kindles like a tongue
This dark, this simple dust.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hold back. Do not release
The bell before its time.
Let the long rope of peace
So pregnant in its chime
Through distance gravitate
From pole to silent pole,
Counting with all its weight
The effort of the soul.
Since death and birth obey
One measured harmony,
Shall not the lyre outweigh
The grief-enfolding sea?
When through the bell-rope's span
The music of the just
Has raised the living man,
Give tongue, majestic dust.

Questioning eyes now see
The finite distance move.
How may the company
Of stars preserve his love?
Or who can match the speed
Of whirling nebulae
To the Samaritan's deed
Performed in sympathy?
Not twice, but only once
The evolved in nature stands,
Whether it move in suns
Or pass through living hands.
Now that the starry field
Lies fallen, and the crust
Breaks for the grain to yield,
Give tongue, majestic dust.

The Tolling

All is conjecture here
And affirmation there.
Here is the bell man-rung
And there the angel's tongue.
Ah, could the skies reveal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two spirits in one peal;
But great design has hid
Foreknowledge from the lid.
Here is the reckoning
But there the austere scales swing
Where last is counted first
And confidence reversed.
Yet in the bell we pull
Love's nightingale and bull
Compel a deeper tone
Than either could alone.
Both in the window make
True colours that shall wake
When the last trump is heard;
But Matthew set his word
So firmly that I trace
In dust an angel's face.

The nightingale's dark pain
Heaven's midnight can unchain
Of which this earth's a shade,
And the long love delayed
By that ecstatic tongue
Is always pure and young.
Yet in the bull an old
Earth of momentous mould,
Out of the red marl wrought,
Matches the Maker's thought.
There where a strong shape died
Void air is dignified.
The dying Laocoon,
Tense with his sons in stone,
Wrestling with Fate, blind thralls,
On resurrection calls.
He who, his strength being spent,
Still remained reticent,
Darts his sublime unrest
Into the marvelling breast
Because he did not speak.
Even thus far went the Greek.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Man in his mortal state
Can bear the heavy weight
Of earth and heaven and hell
Compounded in a bell
If he discern the glory
Of John's deep-thundered story
By which a thorn-crowned head
Sinking, to raise the dead,
Has pulled unbounded space
Down, by the weight of grace,
Whose deep-rung moment wins
Forgiveness of all sins.
The impulsive, pagan earth
Gave that proud hunter birth
From whose uplifted hell
The blood of Abel fell.
Yet heaven, since time began,
Loves a reluctant man.
I sigh, for thought has proved
That each, who was so loved,
From stillness can increase
Strength which belongs to peace.

The last, most solemn fires
Teach us that no desires
Can bless as theirs can bless
Who give the wilderness
That dignity of line
From doctrine pounded fine.
In death the fourfold man
Still rules time's bell, and can
Teach the competitive
The loss by which we live.
Deep conflict is the forge
From which their faiths emerge
Who give to humankind
Mind that is more than mind.
The hour when such men die
Translates the galaxy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And keeps, where stars abound,
The selfsame holy ground
Reclaimed from ancient rocks,
Preserved by paradox
Through time and whirling space,
Lost Eden's latter place.

There is no bell that swings,
Though swift as angels' wings,
But answers to the mould
Fiery, primaeval, cold,
In which it first was cast.
Though resurrection's blast
Thrill the resounding nave
And call from niche and grave,
Where sunbeams fall aslant,
Each holy celebrant,
There is no temperate flight
Can raise mankind to light
Save where the font is laid.
Cooled and prepared by shade,
Each must achieve his own
Deliverance from stone,
Pulled by the world to make
True answer, nor to break,
But rise to heaven through weight,
Weaned of an earth made great
Crowning with man-pulled ropes
Those efficacious drops.

I that was born in Wales
Cherish heaven's dust in scales
Which may at dusk be seen
On every village green
Where Tawe, Taff or Wye
Through fields and woods goes by,
Or Western Towy's flame
Writes all its watery name
In gold, and blinds our eyes;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For so heaven's joys surprise,
Like music from mild air
Too marvellous to bear
Within the bell's wild span,
The pausing, conscious man.
Who questions at what age
The dead are raised? To assuage
The curious, vision smooths
The lids of age, and youth's.
Even man's defeated hopes
Are variants of those stops
Which, when the god has played,
No creature stands betrayed.

Yet now the bell falls dumb.
Already he is come
Into that other room
So near to his first home.
And I, who set his age
And this last pilgrimage
Against youth's eager quest,
Turned to his point of rest,
Ask what daemonic force
Still holds man to one course.
There is a power from Fate
Which none can estimate,
Held in the godlike reins.
Nothing but dust remains.
How can a stone bell teach
To all men or to each
The ascending fall of those
In whom heaven's scales repose?
Not even the full-starred night
Can put conception right
Till bone be knit with bone.
Then shall their loss be known.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the beginning of the poem the bell is unrung, and it cannot ring, or cannot ring with satisfaction to the soul, until it is told its right argument by the dust for which it tolls. For every argument but the silent prayer of the dust itself, expecting resurrection, is an evasion of truth, swayed by a too optimistic hope or a too impatient despair from its true music. That music is understood by Simeon, who in his old age lifted the Christchild and saw the light of salvation, when the image of transient man ceased to be transient, and the weight of life in his hands put on immortality and became a weight of glory.

When the bell tolls, the impossible is made possible, and the transfigured wisdom of angels is made accessible for a moment to the blind devotion of the mourners; for man is made to know, through love, more than he knows. The soul of the dead has not died, and it may be recalled by the silence of love itself. Within that silence the voice of the nightingale, remembering the soul as soul, promises undiminished ecstasy, and the voice of the bull, remembering the soul as body, reminds the mourners of the dignity of death; both contribute to the force of love at the committal.

The pathos of pre-Christian love lies in its incompleteness, the prophetic nature of pre-Christian death in its reticence. Thus, Laocoon represents the bull's thirst for resurrection, and Abel, the nightingale's. Their deaths, and all future deaths, are simultaneous in the bell's tolling.

The bell itself is more than an instrument. It is involved with all for whom it has tolled, and its resonance has the power to beckon everyone whom its sound has touched. Before it rises, it must sink to its full weight at the end of the rope, and lie there, as the dead body must, under a single thread, expecting resurrection. The harmony within the bell, and within the dead body, is musically controlled, and depends upon the mercy and judgment of heavenly scales for its peace. These scales are discernible everywhere in nature, but they may be discerned only by the intuition, not by the reason. They reveal that unredeemed man, through acquisitiveness, wills his own perdition, but that redeemed man, falling through time deliberately, is raised by loss. Whether in Eden or on the banks of the four Welsh rivers named in the poem, the resurrection of the body is assured, not by the instinct of self-preservation, but by the moment of loss, of the whole man's recurrent willingness to lose himself to an act of love.

—V. W.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARK SCHORER

Women in Love and Death

In Lawrence's little read, brilliantly extended Introduction to Maurice Magnus's *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion,* we encounter this passage:

> "Why!" I said. "Is it you?"
> "Yes," he replied. "A terrible thing has happened."
> He waited on the stairs, and I went down. Rather unwillingly, because I detest terrible things and the people to whom they happen.

The people to whom they happen. Put this phrase beside an early exchange between Birkin and Gerald in *Women In Love* —

> "You think people should just do as they like."
> "I think they always do."—

put these two together, and we are at the very center of the startling development that the old idea that "Character is fate" achieves in Lawrence, and particularly here, in *Women In Love.* If we consider this development in relation to uses of the same idea in earlier novels, we will see just how it is startling. Over a third of *The Portrait of a Lady,* for example, is "taken up with brushwork", according to Stephen Spender's mistaken reading, "that has nothing to do with the story." Really, James is painting in all the features of Isabel Archer's lovely, candid intelligence which is yet an intelligence where every virtue shades off into not, perhaps, a vice, but at least a false perception—all this so that we can recognize the inevitability of her renunciation of the right to ignorance once her education in corruption is completed, and she gains her moral freedom in the paradox of social slavery. This is among our finest demonstrations in fiction of the belief in the freedom of the will and the responsibilities of that freedom—a belief that necessarily selects for its emphasis the concept "character" from the whole phrase "character is fate". Take, now, Joseph Conrad's understanding of the proposition as it is implied by his title, *Chance,* and as this implication pervades all his novels. Chance is accident, and in accident lies opportunity, *that* kind of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chance: determinism and free will, the will operating out from the ground that accident allows it. And here, of course, the emphasis falls upon "fate" in that whole phrase "character is fate". In Lawrence, the two terms become equivalents, the emphasis distributed with complete equality and balance, "chance being at one with choice at last", as Yeats succinctly says. The new development in Lawrence is found most clearly in his theme of the victim who invites the victimizer, the murderee who invites the murderer. Because the equivalence of these terms had not previously been handled in fiction, and because of the extremity with which Lawrence felt the urgency of his interpretation for the modern world, the idea that we can and constantly do choose our fate, not only our social or our psychological fate, but our final fate, our *destiny,* choose life or death—because of the novelty of this interpretation in fiction and the extremity with which Lawrence felt it, he abandoned the kind of novel he had been writing and the kinds of novel that had been written by others, and attempted instead to write the novel as psychic drama. He first became aware of the alteration in his aims as he was writing *The Rainbow;* he became completely aware of it as he was writing *Women In Love.* The change can be seen in four ways:

First, characterization. The whole notion of character in fiction undergoes an alteration. He will now create more *essential* beings, will be concerned first of all not with the "ego" that interests the traditional novelist, but with the "primal forces" that are prior to "character".

> I don't think the psychology is wrong, it is only that I have a different attitude to my characters, and that necessitates a different attitude in you, which you are not prepared to give. As for its being my cleverness which would pull the thing through—that sounds odd to me, for I don't think I am so very clever, in that way. I think the book is a bit futuristic—quite unconsciously so. But when I read Marinetti—"The profound intuitions of life added one to the other, word by word, according to their illogical conception, will give us the general lines of an intuitive physiology of matter"—I see something of what I am after. I translate him clumsily, and his Italian is often obfuscated—and I don't care about physiology of matter—but somehow—that which is physic—non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> moral scheme is what I object to. In Turgenev, and in Tolstoi, and in Dostoevsky, the moral scheme into which all the characters fit—and it is nearly the same scheme—is, whatever the extraordinariness of the characters themselves, dull, old, dead. When Marinetti writes: "It is the solidity of a blade of steel that is interesting by itself, that is, the uncomprehending and inhuman alliance of its molecules in resistance to, let us say, a bullet. The heat of a piece of wood or iron is in fact more passionate, for us, than the laughter or tears of a woman"—then I know what he means. He is stupid, as an artist, contrasting the heat of the iron and the laugh of the woman. Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat: it is the inhuman will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti—physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don't so much care about what the woman *feels*—in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an *ego* to feel with. I only care about what the woman *is*—what she is—inhumanly, physiologically, materially—according to the use of the word: but for me, what she *is* as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater, inhuman will), instead of what she feels according to the human conception. That is where the futurists are stupid. Instead of looking for the new human phenomenon, they will only look for the phenomena of the science of physics to be found in human beings. They are crassly stupid. But if anyone would give them eyes, they would pull the right apples off the tree, for their stomachs are true in appetite. You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any other we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, "Diamond, what! This is carbon." And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) . . . Again, I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.

In the novel itself, Birkin tells us that personalities are not very interesting, that there are only a few great ideas that animate all individuals: these are the basic elements, the carbon: life and death, the two possible allegiances. And these are the psychic engagements that the novelist wishes to explore, just as they are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the elements beneath the social character that interest Birkin in forming his personal relationships:

> He looked at her, to see if he felt that she was good-looking.
>
> "I don't *feel* that you're good-looking," he said.
>
> "Not even attractive?" she mocked, bitingly.
>
> He knitted his brows in sudden exasperation.
>
> "Don't you see that it's not a question of visual appreciation in the least," he cried. "I don't *want* to see you. I've seen plenty of women, I'm sick and weary of seeing them. I want a woman I don't see."
>
> "I'm sorry I can't oblige you by being invisible," she laughed.
>
> "Yes," he said, "you are invisible to me, if you don't force me to be visually aware of you. But *I* don't want to see you or hear you."
>
> "What did you ask me to tea for, then?" she mocked.
>
> "I want to find you, where you don't know your own existence, the you that your common self denies utterly. But I don't want your good looks, and I don't want your womanly feelings, and I don't want your thoughts nor opinions nor your ideas—they are all bagatelles to me."
>
> "You are very conceited, Monsieur," she mocked. "I think you want to tell me you love me, and you go all this way round to do it."
>
> "All right," he said, looking up with sudden exasperation. "Now go away then, and leave me alone. I don't want any more of your meretricious persiflage."
>
> "Is it really persiflage?" she mocked, her face really relaxing into laughter.

This quotation is even more helpful than Lawrence's letter to an understanding of the change that has come over his intention since *Sons and Lovers,* and certainly it points to his new problem as a novelist. "I want to find you, where you don't know your own existence, the you that your common self denies utterly." And all the rest, all that attaches to the conscious, social character, is it, for a novelist, "really persiflage", "meritricious persiflage"? If it is, then the novel as it was written before Lawrence had been built on persiflage, since its generic character depends on the development of conflict out of social materials, and if we took Lawrence's letter with complete literalness, or Birkin's ambition as a true equivalent to the ambition of Lawrence, the novelist, he would be directed toward such a novelistic disaster as Virginia Woolf's *The Waves,* albeit in his terms. So we may say at once that in the novel, the *pure* psychic drama is an impossibility, and that we do not have that attempt here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What we have, in fact, are several different orders of characterization, the orders that traditionally appear in the novel. We have a group of "free" characters, and a group of "bound" characters. The free characters are limited to four, the four who actively seek out their fate through the plot movement; the rest are all fixed in their social roles, and in rigid social scenes, and, except perhaps for Hermione and the elder Criches, are caricatures whose fate is sealed before the outset. These have all taken the way of death, and therefore they exist at the level of the social personality alone, and they are characterized by means of the familiar technique of caricature, maximum selection. But the free characters, the four, are compounded of a double drive, and it is here that the method of characterization is new and unfamiliar. They have their social existence and they have their psychic existence; the first is inevitably an expression of the second, but in the second lies their whole motivation. As two take the way of death, their social role becomes more and more important ("Civilized society is insane", reflects Constance Chatterley). And as the two others take the way of life, their social role becomes less important, ceases, in fact, to exist. This has been Birkin's ambition and struggle throughout, the need to isolate himself on the cliff of self-responsibility, outside society yet not outside human relationship.

> "If I find I can live sufficiently by myself," he continued, "I shall give up my work altogether. It has become dead to me. I don't believe in the humanity I pretend to be part of, I don't care a straw for the social ideals I live by, I hate the dying organic form of social mankind —so it can't be anything but trumpery, to work at education. I shall drop it as soon as I am clear enough—tomorrow perhaps—and be by myself."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "What I want is a strange conjunction with you—" he said quietly; "—not meeting and mingling;—you are quite right:—but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings:—as the stars balance each other."

The attempt is by no means an entire success, as the final pages of the novel make quite clear, but because of the nature of the attempt, the characterization of Birkin is not an entire success, either. He, more exclusively than any of the others, embodies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lawrence's ambition to handle the carbon in character, his drama comes nearest to being the pure psychic drama, but for the very reason that his sufferings and his struggle have no social objectification and cannot have, he tends to elude us as a novelistic being. The contrast with Gerald is instructive.

The second large difference between *Women In Love* and the traditional novel is in the notion of structure. The book is to have no mechanical plot (or only the shadow of a mechanical plot), it is to have no "story" in the conventional sense; instead, it is developed in separate episodes, and these only sporadically developed as "scenes". Yet these are meant to form a pattern of psychic relationships ("the form of some other rhythmic form"), a pattern of psychic movement with a large *general* rhythm, but without the objective or rationalized frame of the old novel.

Because it does not have this rationalized frame, *Women In Love* gives a first impression of much greater looseness and even aimlessness than it actually has, and if we can begin reading it not as what it begins by seeming—a realistic novel—but as a drama of primal compulsions, a psychic symbolization, it will be seen to have its own kind of coherence, its own kind of organized—indeed, highly and complexly organized—structural presentation of theme. It is a different kind of structure from Conrad's or James's or Hardy's, bearing, perhaps, a more immediate relationship to the art of dance than to the traditional art of fiction. As in dance, it develops through the shifting allegiances between the members, and the configuration of characters, their thematic signifying, is perhaps the strictest of all English novels.

The basic pattern is established at once: Gudrun feels drawn to Gerald; Ursula feels drawn to Birkin. Each of these males is presently seen in another relationship with females: Gerald with the Pussum, whom he destroys, as she wishes; Birkin with Hermione, who is determined to dominate him by force of her will. In the second chapter, Birkin enunciates the theme. There are no accidents, he says; death seeks death; individuation is life; between the two is a perilous balance. From this discussion emerges presently the double idea: of Will—victim and victimizer, and of death, symbolized socially in the coal mines, intellectually in Bohemia, the two finally brought together in Loerke, the industrial artist; and of Being—wholeness of function, symbolized first in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the African statue, and throughout the novel by the natural order—flowers, animals.

Through this quartet of characters this theme will sound, but the variations played upon it are intricate and subtle, for it is of the essence of Lawrence's intuition that these two poles are not fixed or static; they are fluid forces in perpetual conflict, of dissolution and resolution; so that he creates a kind of psychical dialectic, and his relationships are not for a minute rigid. The pattern is fluid, as these two forces and their derivatives attract and repel.

Thus, at the opening of the novel, Birkin, the man of life, is in a deathy mood as a consequence of his long relationship with Hermione, and he puts up a certain resistance to Ursula, who seeks life. Ursula herself on occasion yearns for real death as an escape from an intolerable, living death in society, and on those occasions, she resists the life in Birkin and turns to Hermione, just as Birkin, rejected, turns to Gerald with an idea of *Blutbruderschaft*—a complete commitment of one male to another. Such an invitation Gerald, in his turn, is incapable of accepting, and the great pivotal chapter, "The Industrial Magnate", shows us why. This is at once an interlude and a keystone, a projection of individual failure into the fabric of the social structure. The old man (impotent love) is here opposed to Gerald, the son (abstract hate), and between them is the defeated will of the mother. This is a superb image of industrial society in its psychic organization, and Gerald, as "God of the machine", has "converted the industry into a new and terrible purity"—which is death itself. Thus, through the variations, the larger form of the "process" is working in both Ursula and Gudrun, and in the two men. The sisters draw apart, each toward her destiny in a man, and the Ursula-Birkin situation comes to its climax in the chapter called "Excurse", in Birkin's self-recognition and in the achievement of their "polarity" in relationship.

The other side of the story now develops contrariwise. In "Death and Love", the death of Gerald's father drives him to Gudrun, by way of the graveyard; he brings the clay of his father's new grave into her bedroom. This is love *as* death, and the process now need only resolve itself, as it quickly does. The four go abroad. Ursula and Birkin find the cold Alps uncongenial

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and leave; Gudrun pits her will against Gerald. She is on the way to becoming a Hermione, but because hers is the death-seeking, not the life-seeking antagonist, Gudrun wins: she kills him, which is also what he has sought. And the novel ends on the partial resolution found by Ursula and Birkin. It seems to say that they have found as much as can be expected by any two individuals unless more individuals will make their effort.

It is instructive to compare this fluid, dance-like movement with the characteristic structure of Thomas Hardy, as, for example, in *Jude The Obscure*. The scheme here is a kind of rigidly counterpointed interchange of character that Hardy much enjoyed. He begins with Jude and Arabella. Then he sets up Sue and Philotson. Then Jude and Sue reverse their roles, and at the end, they reverse them yet again, returning to their original partners. It is like a folk-dance figure, and Hardy's interest is in making it come full circle; it is perfectly expressive of the iron morality that obsessed his imagination. "The certain moral scheme is what I object to", Lawrence declared, and referred, of course, not to Hardy, but to that social morality with which most novelists, including Hardy, have generally been concerned, and of which the traditional notion of plot is an expression. Lawrence wishes to explore a deeper life, a life that seethes and boils beneath institutions as it seethes and boils beneath "personalities".

This is the third great difference between *Women In Love* and other novels, the theme and subject themselves. The structure of the novel is so precisely and so richly expressive of this theme that, after even a cursory examination of the structure, little more need be said of theme. But we should observe how explicit Lawrence is in enunciating it. Half way through the novel we come upon this exact antithesis:

> Birkin thought of Gerald. He was one of those strange white wonderful demons from the north, fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery. And was he fated to pass away in this knowledge, this one process of frost-knowledge, death by perfect cold? Was he a messenger, an omen of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow?
>
> Birkin was frightened. He was tired, too, when he had reached this length of speculation. Suddenly his strange, strained attention gave way, he could not attend to these mysteries any more. There was another way, the way of freedom. There was the paradisal entry into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields.

The relationships of the novel are founded on this opposition, on the idea of death and life and death-in-life; and the characters move entirely in terms of these two impulses, their conflicts and their embraces developing out of their allegiance to one or the other. Love is, of course, Lawrence's focus, since he wished to say that in modern life we use love for death-purposes more frequently than we do for life-purposes. ("The point about love is that we hate the word because we have vulgarised it. It ought to be proscribed, tabooed from utterance, for many years, till we get a new, better idea.") Lawrence's theme, as we have suggested, is dramatized in terms of a struggle between what he calls Will (which may be either sensual or "spiritual", a death impulse in either case) and Being, that integration of the total self which is life. Will is the integration of the drive of ego toward power, toward domination; it has its inverse in the desire to be overpowered, to be dominated, to yield everything to dissolution. Will is mechanical, and its symbol is therefore the machine; its historical and social embodiment is an industrial society that lives by war. Being is the integration of life forces in total and complete self-responsibility. Its historical embodiment lives in the future.

Lawrence had, of course, a conviction that the novel can still do what it has never done in the past. It is a conviction that follows upon his generally prophetic purpose. In the famous ninth chapter of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* he says that the novel "can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead." The two elements here point to the two major technical developments in this novel: the concern with the future, with the smashing of dead patterns and the release of life into new ones, has a direct effect in the concept of structure and the use of structure that we have examined; the attempt to make a direct approach to our "sympathetic consciousness" has an immediate effect in Lawrence's sense of language and his use of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

language. The fourth difference, then, is in the style of *Women In Love,* and particularly in the visionary quality that is generated by the style.

An appeal to our "sympathetic consciousness" must be absolutely direct—as direct as music or dance. We must be made to *feel* this conflict not in our intellects but in our nerves, as it were, if it is to mean anything at all. Lawrence argues throughout, of course, but the only effective argument is in the direct presentation, which comes to us, if it does, through the style. This Lawrence seemed to know, since he deliberately attempts, first of all, a kind of incantatory prose through the use of repetition, a kind of drugged choral quality, which is perhaps what E. M. Forster had in mind when he said that Lawrence was the only modern novelist "in whom song predominates, who has the rapt bardic quality." It is Forster, too, who speaks of the achievement of Lawrence's style as the "irradiation of the universe and the objects that compose it." This would have to do with diction and figure rather than with rhythm, and we can perhaps see the intention in the high use of color, and in the resulting spectacular quality of the images and of the flitting scenes: ". . . through the man in the closed wagon Gudrun could see the whole scene spectacularly, isolated and momentary, like a vision isolated in eternity." This is a description of the best moments in the novel—scenes such as that where the whole party goes bathing—

> The first to run across the lawn was the little Italian, small and like a cat, her white legs twinkling as she went, ducking slightly her head, that was tied in a gold silk kerchief. She tripped through the gate and down the grass, and stood, like a tiny figure of ivory and bronze, at the water's edge, having dropped off her towelling, watching the swans, which came up in surprise. Then out ran Miss Bradley, like a large, soft plum in her dark-blue suit. Then Gerald came, a scarlet silk kerchief round his loins, his towels over his arms. He seemed to flaunt himself a little in the sun, lingering and laughing, strolling easily, looking white but natural in his nakedness. Then came Sir Joshua, in an overcoat, and lastly Hermione, striding with stiff grace from out of a great mantle of purple silk, her head tied up in purple and gold. Handsome was her stiff, long body, her straight-stepping white legs, there was a static magnificence about her as she let the cloak float loosely away from her striding. She crossed the lawn like some strange memory, and passed slowly towards the water.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Attempts at this quality of the spectacular, of the hallucinated, are not always successful; certainly the three women dancing in Oriental costumes conveniently provided do not quite get into the convention that Lawrence is trying to develop, and the scene of Gudrun, doing her Dalcroze rhythms in the presence of the livestock, does not quite escape the ridiculous. Yet we must recognize, all through the novel, this attempt at the spectacular, the eternally isolated, which leads to the hallucinated effects, and throughout to the strangely irritating compulsive qualities of dreams—

> She put her hand on the arm of her care-worn, sallow father and frothing her light draperies, proceeded over the eternal red carpet. Her father, mute and yellowish, his black beard making him look more care-worn, mounted the steps stiffly, as if his spirit were absent; but the laughing mist of the bride went along with him undiminished.
>
> And no bridegroom had arrived! It was intolerable for her. Ursula, her heart strained with anxiety, was watching the hill beyond; the white, descending road, that should give sight of him. There was a carriage. It was running. It had just come into sight. Yes, it was he. Ursula turned towards the bride and the people, and, from her place of vantage, gave an inarticulate cry. She wanted to warn them that he was coming. But her cry was inarticulate and inaudible, and she flushed deeply, between her desire and her wincing confusion.

To this development of style we should add the insistent contrast of the diction between the mechanical and the organic, and the attempt of the style to persuade us of the *force* inhering in all life. A third development of style is mentioned in Lawrence's own preface. "In point of style, fault is often found with the continual, slightly modified repetition. The only answer is that it is natural to the author; and that every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro which works up to culmination." The attempt to duplicate, in syntactical movement itself, the dialectical flow of the theme is perhaps a mistaken aesthetic ambition, but we should observe it as part of Lawrence's particular kind of integrity as an artist.

The intention of *Women In Love* is so tremendous, so central to our lives, that we must for our own sakes make an effort to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tolerate it. I say tolerate for the reason that I have known almost no readers who, on *first* reading, did not find it either opaque beyond endurance, or tiresome, or revolting. This has been the response even of readers who can agree with Lawrence when he in effect equates plot as we have known it with a morality that has lost its relevance, even its reality. Yet is it not the fact that the reason the novel is difficult to judge is that it will not accept the disciplines of plot, but does not quite find some new limitation that will *contain* this material, so that we are repeatedly asked to love Lawrence the man in order to accept Lawrence the novelist? Scenes like that in which Birkin invites Gerald to be his blood brother, repulsive to our social sense, grotesque before our literary taste, simply say, "Take me at my own level of sincerity, of seriousness, and not at yours, and you will see that this is exactly right." And the question is whether a novelist has the right to impose himself to this extent on his reader, even when his reader is eager to accept as much as he can, even when his reader, like the present writer, cannot, after eight or ten readings of this novel, imagine being without it. It is possible that *Women In Love* attempts to do more than the novel as we know it and even as Lawrence developed it itself knows how to do. This does not for a moment mean that the attempt must not be made. No novelist speaks more directly to us than Lawrence, and if we can't hear him, we are, I quite believe, lost. But he has not, in this book, found the whole way to speak. His attempt to move into the realm of psychic drama we can take seriously in a way that we cannot take the diluted attempt of Virginia Woolf; but can we always hear what Lawrence wants us to hear? The question is not whether he is *right;* the question is, What is a novel?

Judging *Women In Love* in its own terms as a single work, I should say that its success is partial; judging it as a step in a career, I should remove the qualification. It is perhaps the most important single work in Lawrence's formal education. If we follow him on from *Women In Love,* through the next really shattered books, and to the end, we will see that he took, finally, two ways: in his last two books, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Man Who Died,* both, in my view, very great books, he divided the intention that in *Women In Love* is one. In *Lady Chatterley,* he retrenches his claims a little—it is a novel in a solid and sus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tained social context, and it is a novel with a clear and happily developed plot, in which characters function fully and the author lets them speak for themselves; in *The Man Who Died,* he made an absolutely unqualified claim for the sanctity of the purely self-responsible individual human being, society not more than a shadowy threat outside the novel, and he gives us a real image of what he does not give us in Birkin, the wholly integrated man; but he writes in the form of the fable. And this is, perhaps, as far as we have gone with the novel.

For the novel always drags us back into the world, into circumstance. Conrad says that "the energy of evil is so much more forcible than the energy of good", and perhaps this is because in novels, at least, pure evil does not exist whereas there are those novelists who attempt to make pure good prevail. That is the problem of the novel as a genre: it must stay in the world we know, the world where machines are a reality, where wickedness exists. We see this problem demonstrated in *Women In Love,* where Gerald, the social sinner, is so much more real than Birkin, the liberated, integrated man at last outside society; where Gerald's frozen death in the snows of the Tyrol has all the force and pathos of the greatest novels, the real Russian bang (one of the few times we hear it in English fiction), but where Birkin's fulfilment is felt vague and unresolved and a little petulant. We can see the problem in other novelists: in George Eliot's *Middlemarch,* where Dorothea Brooke, that perfect heroine, can find almost nothing to do in the plot; or in Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove,* where the perfect purity of Milly Theale recedes, in the end, into an image of spread wings but hardly of a woman.

Lawrence saw this problem in the novel:

> The novel is a great discovery; far greater than Galileo's telescope or somebody else's wireless. The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained. Why? Because it is so incapable of the absolute. . . . In a novel, everything is relative to everything else, if that novel is art at all. . . You can fool pretty nearly every other medium. You can make a poem pietistic, and still it will be a poem. You can write *Hamlet* in a drama: if you wrote him in a novel, he'd be half comic, or a trifle suspicious: a suspicious character, like Dostoevsky's Idiot. Somehow, you sweep the ground a bit too clear in the poem or the drama, and you let the human Word fly a bit too freely. Now in the novel there's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> always a tom-cat, a black tom-cat that pounces on the white dove of the Word, if the dove doesn't watch it; and there is a banana-skin to trip on; and you know there is a water-closet on the premises. All these things help to keep the balance.

This is wonderfully incisive literary criticism, but if we apply it to Lawrence's own novels, we see that over and over they end at the point where the "relative" is being left behind, the dove escaping the cat, and they move into poetic vision. Lawrence knew well enough what the limits of the novel are, but his own novels nevertheless continually strain to get beyond those limits, and it is in this strain that both his imperfections and his greatest writing inhere. That, however, is the subject for another essay.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RICHARD WILBUR

Beasts

Beasts in their major freedom
Slumber in peace tonight. The gull on his ledge
Dreams in the guts of himself the moon-plucked waves below,
And the sunfish leans on a stone, slept
By the lyric water;

In which the spotless feet
Of deer make dulcet splashes, and to which
The ripped mouse, safe in the owl's talon, cries
Concordance. Here there is no such harm
And no such darkness

As the selfsame moon observes
Where, warped in window-glass, it sponsors now
The werewolf's painful change. Turning his head away
On the sweaty bolster, he tries to remember
The mood of manhood,

But lies at last, as always,
Letting it happen, the fierce fur soft to his face,
Hearing with sharper ears the wind's exciting minors,
The leaves' panic, and the degradation
Of the heavy streams.

Meantime, at high windows
Far from thicket and pad-fall, suitors of excellence
Sigh and turn from their work to construe again the painful
Beauty of heaven, the lucid moon
And the risen hunter;

Making such dreams for men
As told will break their hearts as always, bringing
Monsters into the city, crows on the public statues,
Navies fed to the fish in the dark
Unbridled waters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Pelican[1]

PELLICANUS is the word
For a certain breed of bird
Who truly is a crane;
Egypt is his domain.
There are two kinds thereof;
Near to the Nile they live;
One of them dwells in the flood,
The fishes are his food;
The other lives in the isles
On lizards, crocodiles,
Serpents, and stinking creatures,
And beasts of evil nature.
In Greek his title was
Onocrotalos,
Which is *longum rostrum,* said
In the Latin tongue instead,
Or *long-beak* in our own.
Of this bird it is known
That when he comes to his young,
They being grown and strong,
And does them kindly things,
And covers them with his wings,
The little birds begin
Fiercely to peck at him;
They tear at him and try
To blind their father's eye.
He falls upon them then
And slays them with great pain,
Then goes away for a spell,
Leaving them where they fell.
On the third day he returns,
And thereupon he mourns,
Feeling so strong a woe
To see the small birds so
That he strikes his breast with his beak
Until the blood shall leak.

[1]Translated from Philippe de Thaun's Anglo-Norman *Bestiary,* written circa 1120.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And when the coursing blood
Spatters his lifeless brood,
Such virtue does it have
That once again they live.

KNOW that this pelican
Signifies Mary's Son;
The little birds are men
Restored to life again
From death, by that dear blood
Shed for us by our God.
Now learn one meaning more,
Revealed by holy lore:
Know why the small birds try
To peck their father's eye,
Who turns on them in wrath
And puts them all to death.
Men who deny the light
Would blind God's blazing sight;
But on such people all
His punishment will fall.
This is the meaning I find;
Now bear it well in mind.

The Nature of The Whale[2]

WHALE is the greatest beast
In all the ocean waste;
Whom if you ever espied
Sprawling upon the tide,
An isle he would seem to be,
Built on the sands of the sea.

When this fierce fish would feed,
He spreads his great mouth wide
And thence expels his breath,
The sweetest smell on earth.
The other fishes come,
Ravished by that perfume;
They dawdle within his jaws,

[2]From the Middle English *Bestiary*, 13th century.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unwary of the ruse.
He slams his jaw-gates then,
And drinks those fishes in. . . .

This whale-fish dwells secure
Down near the ocean floor
Until that season arrives
When winter with summer strives
And storm stirs all the sea;
In such inclemency
His lair he cannot keep,
But up from the troubled deep
He rises, and lies still.
Then while the weather is ill,
Sailors driven and tossed
Who fear that they are lost,
Sighting the quiet whale,
Mistake him for an isle.
They view him with delight
And hasten with all their might
To make their vessels fast
And climb ashore at last;
With tinder, steel, and stone
They kindle a blaze thereon,
Warm them, and drink, and eat.
But, feeling the fire's heat,
The whale to sea-deep dives
And robs them of their lives.

Signification

The Devil is great in will,
With monstrous force and skill
(These powers he imparts
To witches in their arts);
He gives men hunger and thirst
And many another lust,
Drawing them by his breath,
To follow which is death . . .
Who hears the Devil's word
Will rue the day he heard;
Who ties his hopes thereto
Will plunge with him below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM ALFRED

Keen for Bridget Kelly

Remembering the table that you set
For sixty years, for Kelly, and for all
Whom you felt Providence had dared forget
And you'd the angry decency to recall;
Remembering you, you cynical volunteer
In the service of a love you feigned was not,
I'm disgusted by the inadequacy of tears,
The mourner's armband, the old truelove knot.
To think the gipsy eyes in that shrewd face
Should gutter out, that fond foul mouth be sown,
Those sudden hands that kept things in their place,
Handcuffed by rosaries, be nuzzled to the bone.
It is as if I looked and saw no sky
The first drunk day of the spring's armistice.
It is amazing you should come to die.
What in Christ's name is there to say but this?

For His Friend, the Lover, Now at Liberty

In Memoriam: P. V. B.

What is it you thought for me to know
Would shame you worse than spit or blow
So in that ditch of secrecy
You lie and cannot speak to me?—
The age be damned that from mere lust
Has made a devil's catalyst
Precipitating this sharp death
That rustles in the mildest breath!
The age be damned has laid this silence
Upon the heart's God-given violence
Whose old convulsions sometimes drove
Men to the impossibility of love.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It isn't only lust can keep
The heavy body from its sleep:
It's to have known the things I have
And lacked the courage to relieve.
That more than an aborted kiss
Can crucify with sleeplessness.
It isn't only lust can keep
The heavy body from its sleep.

No wonder now our love grows ineffectual:
Our lepers all are intellectual,
Fool, pathic, communist,
The kind that can't be kissed.

I pace these empty river banks
You loved so much with so little thanks,
And walked along in your sad pride,
As if with a jailor at your side,
To whom no muscle of your face
Must admit to the disgrace
He would see rise from the shot colt's tooth
To twist its every flexure with,
I, who with those around me here,
Incapable of public tears,
Made up that jailor, lent an eye
To watch you gather strength to die.

If when you drank that heat and light
That burned your blood till your eyes grew bright,
Water, and earth, and air were one,
If the unbridled hurtling on
Of that starved, long-throttled fire
Coördinated your desire,
And the hot heart with that strong flame,
Cast light on What we cannot name,
For that fierce vision, pardon us
Our base and reputable cowardice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINTHROP PALMER

Arlington Cemetery
Looking Toward The Capitol

This is not all I would have said
To the long line of upright marble dead
With your gilded dome hanging overhead,
Not alone in their name have our sons died.

To-day the river contains their field and trees.
The oak in scarlet, the willows in silver and green
Attend a small parade of civil mourners
Who claim from death a lover, a child or a man.

Wispy and travel-stained the dingy creatures
Pretend they would recover some cherished body
From your anonymous fame. Their shuttered eyes pray.

Mortals go blind to see an angel.
Human sight comes short, looks sharp, stays earth-bound,
Lights up the cavalcade, the Great Gate and that dome;
Not man, not God, only Rome.

Revelation

"How shall a beast have eyes within,
Wings, voice and the face of man?
Is the sea glass and God a stone?"

"The eye of the beast was my desire,
The wings of his body a fan of fire,
And stone the face of God's despair.

I was carried away in spirit to the Whore
Who sits in purple and the scarlet colour;
The waters at her feet are glass, and more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the voice of the beast I was carried away,
God—made and fashioned to agree
That torment be lived deliciously."

Caesar

And these are yours: Moscow, Washington, Bombay,
The names of office, the fierce terms of state
That coin your province and exchange your face.
A numerous disguise.
It shuts away
The tender person from a helpless sight.
Great absence mystifies the rod of might.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEN REID

Papa Haydn's Dead and Gone

SHAVING AND WHISTLING, DAVE HEARD his daughter's clear eight-year-old falsetto bent around two partitions.

> "Go saddle up my milk-white steed,
> And blanket up my roan-O;
> And I will ride o'er the country-side
> And search for the black-jack gypsy-O."

What body is she inhabiting now? he wondered. The urge to see her moved him across the breakfast room to the dining room doorway, where he leaned and looked.

In an old green cotton formal of Dolly's, the waist hiked up—not quite enough—with a cowboy belt, she was standing before the oval mirror over the chest, tiptoe on the hem, posing on her head a crown scalloped from the open end of a brown paper bag.

"And who might you be?" he asked.

Her roguery fused with his in the mirror. "Howdy, Pa." She grinned; then to his question, "Mary, Queen of Scots." Then, hands on hips, she rolled a shoulder, batted lush eyelashes, lengthened a lip. "Meddy, Queen of Scots."

He snorted and turned to go, but the voice, the forefinger leaped imperially. "Wait!" she thundered. "Wait, varlet, you can be king."

He protested. "Look, Bets, I'm trying to shave." He pointed to his lathered face.

"Silence! I've always wanted a king with a white beard, and you can be him." She moved toward him, a hand outstretched to lead him to the throne room; but halfway the long dress trapped her and she pitched forward, catching herself on her elbows on the carpet. Unhurt and unembarrassed, she arose, gave the dress a mighty tug, and took his hand. She touched a razor-wide strip of flesh in the lather. "You can be wounded, too."

For a solemn, vacant instant they stood face to face in the center of the room. What do a king and queen *do?* He could feel her wondering. "Shall we dance?" he offered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's it," she said, gladly; and they made a grave ellipsoid progress, punctuated by spasmodic hitches at the gown.

"Strike up a tune," he suggested.

"Okay." She stopped, he saw her gaze turn inward. Then,

> "Papa Haydn's dead and gone,
> But his mem'ry lingers on;
> When his mood was one of bliss
> He wrote jolly tunes like this."

She caroled clear and gay, and the dance became a prance.

He stopped them after a minute, breathless. "What's that?" he panted. "What's that piece?"

She stood still, indulging his thirty-one years. Then, broad and smug, "Aiah from d' S'prise Symph'ny. Us had it in Music yestiddy. Come on!" And they were off again.

> "When his mood was one of bliss
> He wrote jolly tunes like this."

They circled skipping, and the crown teetered and tottered and finally fell. That stopped them again, and he edged toward the bathroom. "Anybody that would wear a crown on yellow pigtails would suck aigs." He fell into her dialect, one of the half-dozen she had brought back from a summer of radios and comic books and natives at her grandparents' in Tennessee.

She was posing seriously before the mirror again. "What's wrong with suckin' aigs?" she asked. Then in the mirror her eye caught his tentative movement. "Hey, don't go!"

But he slipped away. "I've got to get ready for the party, Ladybird." Then, as he renewed his lather and tried to remember what he had been whistling, her voice followed him.

"Do you *have* to go to this party?"

Did he? "Duty calls," he said.

There was silence for a moment. "What's duty?" she called. A good question, he thought. A good, good question. Riddle me that, my trinity scholard. Then, to cover his silence, he whistled loudly, anything. There was a moment of nothing, then he heard her voice again, singing, and he was safe.

> "Last night she slept in a goosefeather bed,
> Last night she slept with her baby-O;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But tonight she sleeps on the cold, cold ground
With the gypsies all around her-O."

He grinned, remembering the time he had played the ballad for his freshmen in Illinois. He could still see that kid in the back row, that face utterly guileless, "Mr. Marsh, what does that mean, what is 'her O?' " This reminded him, inevitably, of the letter Betsy's teacher had written him after they had let take her "The Eddystone Light" to school. He laughed out loud.

"What's the matter, Pa?" she called him from the dining room. "Cut your throat?" He didn't answer, but laughed again and gave a choking, throat-cut gurgle to oblige her, and took up his whistling. It had come back to him, he realized, the thing he had been whistling first. What was it? Where had he heard it? Something of Brahms? He couldn't say. He had no head for music, really. Then staring, with a slight sense of shock, at his reflection in the mirror, he asked it soberly, Why are you so happy, you sad clown, you jobless wonder?

It had started as an act and become routine. They mustn't let Betsy know, he had insisted. A child should be able to believe that his world, if he likes it, is immutable. So, to shield Betsy, he and Dolly had compacted to say nothing in her presence of the fact that there was no job after this year, the fact that after five years of teaching he must start over. They had set about being studiously gay. The effort had dropped away and fun become easy, an innocent orgy in which they were only intermittently aware of a substratum of thin hysteria. Gradually they grew ashamed of feeling injured and sorry for themselves. But still there were evenings after Betsy was in bed when they sat and rang the hollow changes on why, why? And one night he had lain in bed counting in his mind the paychecks they had remaining. He had felt her hand moving under the covers. "What are you doing?" he had asked. "Nothing . . ." she had said, "I was just counting up the paychecks we've got left." Then they had exploded into laughter, and ended by bandaging themselves together in the other thing that was left to them.

He could hear Dolly, now, splashing in the tub upstairs. Not riddle, he thought suddenly. Latin, Latin me that, my trinity scholard, out of eure sanscreed into oure eryan! Joyce. There was a man. In the absence of God, there is God. He thought of Joyce half-blind in Trieste, half-blind in Zurich, Paris. To hell with it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he says. I say this is the way it is. Dave thought of Joyce reading, the Anna Livia record—how that heartbreaking voice brought you quick and sweet to the edge of tears and you sat there stabbed with sadness and jellied inside and tried to look as if nothing had changed. Tell me, tell me, tell me, elm!

But Joyce, who would not have minded, was interrupted by the comic clatter of Dolly, banging on the waterpipe that joined the two bathrooms.

"Ma'am?" Dave shouted.

"What are you doing?" she called.

"I'm shaving the face."

"How do you like it?"

"Ma'am?"

"How do you like it? How do you like the face?"

He considered it. "Not much," he called. "It's the same damned old thing." Then, "Dolly?"

"Sir?"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm bathing the form."

"Laving," he corrected. "Laving the form. How do you like it?"

She didn't answer. Instead she gave a last, general, violent threshing, swabbed at the water-level ring on the tub and pulled the plug.

Standing on the mat, drying, she felt the faintly chill air of the room shrink and prickle her skin. Do I like it? she asked, looking at it in the long mirror on the door. No, not much, not particularly. It's the same damned old thing, not quite tall enough, not quite thin enough. Admitting for the moment the standard to which she usually avoided giving a name—not as tall or as thin as Markie Downing, from whom, by a process she had never thoroughly understood, she had taken David nine years before.

But I've got him, b'jesus, she thought, even if he can't earn a living. And Markie wouldn't have liked that. She grinned at the mirror. She raised her arms high over her head and posed, turning this way and that. Yes . . . she thought, it's better like that. Now if I could just go around this way all the time . . . She pictured it—to market, to the movies, her arms stretched high, her whole body taut and curved, to the Department cocktail party. "But Dolly," Miss Parkman would say, "why are you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

holding your arms that way?" What would she answer? "I'm a votary," she would say. "I'm a votary, Miss Parkman."

She grinned around the toothbrush, brushing her teeth, leering mammy-lipped with toothpaste froth at the mirror over the basin. That man, she thought; that child.

She tossed her old terrycloth robe over her shoulders and moved to the head of the back stairs into the kitchen. Dave was standing at the sink holding a water glass of sherry to the light to determine, apparently, that it was exactly half full. He was bare to the waist and there were stray stripes of lather on his cheek. He turned then and saw her, put down the glass, and came to the front of the stairs. "Howdy, Ma'am," he said.

"Howdy."

He ran back to the sink, took a sip of the sherry, and returned to the foot of the stairs. "Don't move," he ordered, "I'll come right up."

She pulled the robe closer around her. "You'll nothing," she said. "You'll put your clothes on and go get the sitter."

He held himself frantically to the newel post, in mock-heroic frustration, then retreated to the center of the room. "Dolly," he said, facing her seriously, "let's not go to this party."

"Don't be silly. You know the great man has spoken."

He sipped slowly at the sherry. "Okay, okay. Who's sitting?"

"Emmie."

"Well, come on down and have some wine, anyway."

She hesitated. "All right. A drop." He poured her a half-inch in another tumbler and she sipped it, liking it. "You shouldn't drink all that sherry." She pointed with her glass at his.

He smiled. "My notion is that you ought to *arrive* high at these affairs. Then everybody looks good to you from the beginning. You don't have the strain of the metamorphosis." He looked judicially at his glass. "I know just how this stuff works. For twenty minutes you're hysterical. Then you're sleepy, you can sleep for a winter."

"But if this only lasts twenty minutes, you'll be sleepy when you get to the party."

"Not me," he said. "I had another glass before you came down."

He whooped. Then he drained the glass in two long swallows and stood drumbeating his chest with the flat of his hand. "Shall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we dance?" he shouted. He took her hands and capered madly in a home-made polka. She followed as best she could.

"Let me go," she panted finally, laughing. "We've got to get dressed."

He stood, his heart leaping queerly and his sight a little fuzzed, and watched the progress of Dolly's various tightly-swathed hips up the stairwell until all of them had disappeared. Then he returned to the lavatory and bathed his face and dried it. After a little effort he was able to transfix the mirror and his face in it. He stared at it steadily. It's not a bad face, he thought, as such things go. It looks stronger, I think, than it did ten years ago, and not a whole lot older.

Whistling, caught up with the Brahms again, he buttoned his shirt and went into the living room where Betsy was plunking stolidly at "In the Wigwam" on the ancient upright. "I'm going after Em, honey," he said.

"Okay, okay, you're going after Em." She didn't even look up, and her impatience was magnificent. He blew her a loud raspberry and, still without turning around, she echoed it.

Whistling his way out the kitchen door and across the soft snow to the car in the drive he felt good—alert and happy. The wet, cold air stung his face pleasurably. Inching down the tricky hill into the village proper—'metropolitan Berkton', as Dolly called it—he saw Bill Harley tinkering at one of his storm windows. Dave blew him a horn salute, and Bill turned to wave with the hand that held his pipe. Noble savage, Dave thought, smiling at nobody. The gray afternoon was hovering in.

He pulled into the Sanders' drive and blew for Emmie. She had told him many times he must come to the door and ring; still, he could do without Mrs. Sanders today. Then there was Emmie, hailing him from the porch, carrying, as he could tell even from there, her Latin book. Hircus Civis Eblanensis, he thought briefly, then let it pass. A scarf was knotted under her chin and on her forehead a clump of tight auburn curls made a cluster of Tokay grapes hanging to her eyes, topping the common Winesaps of her cheeks. The neat little bosom was lost in a great gray sweatshirt with Yea Berkton in a rainbow across the chest, the embryonic hips were slick in black ski pants. Nearing the car, she adopted a ferocious frown. "How many times . . ." she began.

"Howdy, lass," he interrupted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She collapsed giggling on the seat, slamming the door, a giggle ten years younger than her hairdo, exactly of an age with the bosom and the hips. "Oh Gawd," she moaned, "she's on the hillbilly kick."

"Yep."

"I guess it'll be a large afternoon, then."

"Very large," he affirmed. "Tremendous."

"After she puts me through a couple of hours of that stuff, I begin to think it's the *right* way to talk. Why—" her eyes were wide—"last week I caught myself talking like that in *History*. All the kids looked at me like I was *nuts*."

But the sherry was settling in, with the help of the heater, and Dave felt himself growing sleepy and watery-eyed. The best he could do was the routine question. "How's your ma and pa?" he asked dully.

"Oh . . ." she said, "okay." He felt, vaguely, that she would have liked to pursue it, but he didn't press.

He preceded her into the living room, where Betsy, sunk in the barrel chair, was poring over her picture dictionary. "Here's Em, honey."

Betsy looked up, critically. "Howdy, stranger," she said. "Light and set."

"Howdy, Buck," said Emmie.

"Slim," Betsy corrected. Emmie snorted.

Dave looked at them for a minute, yawning, not really focusing. "Reckon I'll go upstairs," he said at last.

"In the nick o' time, too," said Betsy as he left the room.

Upstairs, in the bedroom, he saw that Dolly was doing something with her hair. She was wearing something dark red. Then he lay across the bed in his overcoat with his hat over his face and went suddenly and entirely and gratefully to sleep.

Then Dolly was pulling him up from the bed with both hands and pushing him down the hall to the bathroom. She sat him on the edge of the tub while she was wringing out a washcloth in cold water and going over his face.

"Ah . . ." he said, "that's good." She said nothing, and on her face was a frown built on a foundation of smile. "I'm not drunk," he explained, "just sleepy."

"Either you ought to drink oftener, or you ought to drink smaller quantities. You're no good at it at all, this way." Her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voice showed the same confusion of mood as her face. "You okay now?"

"Fine," he said. "Kiss me."

Back in the living room he sat with his hat in his hands, feeling rested and gently drowsy, watching Dolly chattering with the yellow head and the auburn, over near the fireplace. She poked at the fire with feminine ineffectuality, and they watched her. Then she rose quickly, kissed Betsy, and went to the closet for her coat. She emerged, holding the cheap, handsome fur, and he rose. "Here, let me hold your rabbits for you."

"Never mind about my rabbits," she said, "they're warm." She slipped into it and he flipped the loose gold rings of her hair free of the collar. Then, turning to go, she called goodbye to Betsy, and so did he. They were half-way through the dining room when her abstracted answering farewell reached them. They were at the back door when they heard her feet running behind them. She poised in the doorway at the far side of the room, one foot outstretched, pointing tiptoe, both arms thrown wide, embracing the universe.

"Kees me, keed," she commanded. Dolly collapsed in tender laughter, and he smiled, hurting. They kissed her, separately, then together, she with an arm about each of their necks. Then the two of them walked, enhaloed, toward the car.

"Ah loves that child," Dolly breathed.

"Likewise," he said.

"Kees me, keed," she mimicked. "How could we ever be so dumb lucky?" She laughed—the deep, feathery, rilling chuckle, muted, like a single old sleigh bell, rolled along a rug—that still, after ten years, always startled and warmed him.

Then they heard Betsy's violent rap on the glass of the door, and turned to see her throwing extravagant kisses with both hands. Standing at the car they threw them back as best they could, knowing they did it clumsily. To even things Dave started the car and raced it up and down the driveway, forward and back, several times, to Betsy's delighted clapping at the door, Emmie's slightly disgusted glare over her shoulder, Dolly's girlish giggle at his side.

At last, however, they were on the winding back way to the city, and Dolly settled back, still smiling. "Are you drunk or sober?" she asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sober," he said. "Jober as a sudge." Then he picked up his whistle and they rode without speaking for several minutes, feeling, separately, their communal happiness slowly invaded by the prospect of the party, the prospect, beyond that, of the year to come, and beyond that, of other years.

"Who'll be there?" she asked at last.

"At the party? Everybody. This is official." He ticked off a half-dozen. "All the Angles and the Saxons, the Jukes and the Kallikaks."

"Oh God," she sighed. "One at a time these people are very nice, but in a the mass they terrify me." She gave a stage shudder. "What will they talk about this time?"

"Second verse," he said, "same as the first. Politics—lib-lab politics. Cars. Football. Movies. Plays they've seen and you haven't. Sickness—somebody's bound to have been pretty sick. Anything but literature."

But that wasn't fair, and he knew it. These were the things they would talk about to *him*. And the fact implied an evaluation of him, he felt, sorely, depressing the idea. But it was true. Here and there in the room would be little knots of people talking about literature, little enlightened islands to which they had granted him no visa because they didn't quite think he knew enough. Were they right? He didn't know. He didn't think so, most of the time.

The plow had been through and the road was not really slick, but he was driving carefully. They had plenty of time. He watched for mounds or ruts that meant ice underneath, or dark patches that meant fallen branches or sometimes, at the last instant, a squirrel. Near ahead now, at the top of the next rise, he saw a mean little dark silhouette that looked like the upright stump of a limb. When it was too late to stop or swerve, too late to do anything but hope, he saw it was a chipmunk sculptured sentry-like in the snow. He straddled it, holding his breath, then looked for it in the rear-view mirror. The little animal was still erect on its haunches, intact, but swivelling frantically about as if trying to decide what courses were left it in a world where such things could happen.

That's me, he thought electrically, and the idea pleased him. I sit chittering happily in a crystalline wilderness, and then I'm run over by a terrible engine for which I haven't even a name. Now

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm the same, but the world has changed. Question: where do we go from here? He saw that Dolly, lighting a cigarette, had missed the whole thing. It's just as well, he thought. Let's not talk about it.

They passed the hamlet of Ashley and then, topping the rise on the far side of the town, they came upon the scene he had known would be there. The panorama never failed to catch him with a sharp, aching sweetness of ancient familiarity, whose sources he groped for but could not touch. It was a scene that should have been merely beautiful, but actually was quite the reverse, actively disturbing, even terrifying. The hill fell away rapidly a hundred feet or more to a cup that held a frozen pond. On the pond, tiny far below, were bright skaters who never seemed to move. The crest and slope of the hill were furred with scrawny, skeletal white birches, like the couched and rooted spears of an antique, weary army, gone away. Sifting always through the trees, always accompanied by dogs, were new children, trapped in the glittering armory of their skates, going to join the old transfixed on the pond.

Dave stopped the car. Maybe . . . maybe if they stayed a moment he could reach it. He had never been a part of the scene, of that he was sure. But it seemed now as if many, many times he had watched it unobserved, been stricken by it, from just this position. He stretched, touched . . . grasped it. Brueghel! Brueghel's *February*. He turned away sharply from the scene, glad it was out of him at last, out where he could deal with it, glad not he but another had created it. But he felt drawn and hollow, drained. He let himself slump in the seat.

"I could cry," he said flatly.

"What's the matter, Love?" She felt for the proper tone, then leaned over and looked anxiously in his face, and kissed him lightly, compassionately.

"I feel a monologue coming on." He grinned a little, wretchedly. "Or we could make it Socratic, I suppose."

"No," she said, "I'll just listen. I'll bear with you." She swung her body around to face him on the seat.

"I've just been hit over the head by the sadness of this world," he said, tonelessly. He placed his ungloved right hand in the warm hollow between her knees, then, still slumped heavily behind the wheel, he talked on and on, slowly, stopping often to dredge for a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word, while his left hand rose and fell rhythmically on the steering wheel like a soft, inadequate flail. "That scene"—he gestured dumbly with his head, not looking at it.

He talked of the sadness of the fact that those skating children, writ large, were hunters of one kind or another, or warriors of one kind or another. Of the sadness of the fact that the race had changed so little since the days of Old Brueghel. "It's still true that nobody gets anything without taking it away from somebody else," he said.

He talked, apocalyptically, of the war, the rhythmic outcropping of the ancient tooth and nail; of his feeling that the only practical mode of thought in these days was utopian; of his conviction that conflicts had grown so inconceivably complex that the only remaining gestures with meaning were the symbolic ones. "We must have bands of mendicant laymen walking the face of the earth carrying banners—'We must love one another or die.' " (Dolly licked a forefinger and scribbled with it on the air. "I'll record that," she said. She was trying, at that point, astringency.)

But it didn't work, though he was silent for a time; then he whistled for a while, mindlessly, and the whistling grew slower and slower, more and more deeply minor, as he slid down the declivity to greyer introspection, arriving, finally, at the subject of poverty, which Dolly had known must be his real destination. He talked of his childhood, which had moved gradually from comfort to real destitution—of his terror that the same progress might yet come to Betsy. He summed it up, at last, in two scenes he called his "metaphor for happiness" and his "metaphor for sadness."

"I think of one scene that seems to have been repeated many times. I remember it with the air all golden around it—charmed, somehow. I would have gone to bed for my nap in daylight, and then when I woke alone the room was dark. I would get up, sort of languid and stunned, and feel my way to the door and go downstairs to the kitchen. There my mother, who was pretty and dark-haired, and her mother, who was a gentle, thin old lady, would be working at something over near the sink, next to the window. The window was always open, and the breeze came through the screen and blew the curtain a little bit. I would stand there smiling and blinking foolishly in the light, and they would turn and smile at me. That's all there was to it, nothing ever

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happened. Everybody always smiled, and usually there was a moth buzzing at the screen.

"It's funny," he said reflectively, "I see it without outlines—fuzzy. But the smells and sounds of the room are very clear. There was the hammering of the moth, soft, and the smell of flowers and the pond through the window, and the whole air of the place sort of dusty and rosy. Anyway, somehow, that scene has always been my metaphor for complete happiness. That's the way I'd like life to look to Betsy, always, the air always full of a kind of rosy, golden dust."

("It's a lovely scene," Dolly said, "lovely, lovely.")

"I remember Mother and Dad had a terrible argument one night in the dining room. Mother happened to be holding a flyswatter, and when she got so angry she couldn't stand it any longer, she hit Dad right in the face with it. It hurt, I guess, and it knocked his glasses off, and he stood there for a minute looking sort of numb and naked. Even I could see that a flyswatter is a bad thing to hit a man with. A club would have been better. Finally Dad sat right down in a chair at the end of the table, with his arms out in front of him on the table. He made a funny noise, and at first I thought he was laughing; then it dawned on me he was crying. It had never occurred to me before that a man could cry. I just stood there looking from him to Mother.

"Mother went upstairs, and I followed her after a bit, and I could hear her through the bedroom door, crying too. So for a few minutes I sort of shuttled back and forth between them on the stairs, afraid to talk to either one of them. Finally Dad picked up his glasses and put them on and took me out for a walk. 'We mustn't blame Mother,' I remember he said, 'it's very hard for her to be poor.'

"So that evening is my metaphor for sadness," he concluded.

"Yes, darling, I should think so," Dolly said. "But I take an oath never to hit you with a flyswatter." She tried a smile.

"Don't be too sure," Dave said grimly. "You've never been that poor. Which is the main point I've been trying to make, I guess."

"We'll never get that way," she insisted.

"God willing," he said.

After that they sat in complete silence for some minutes, and while they sat darkness arrived. Dolly's hand was resting on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dave's shoulder. The headlights of an occasional passing car picked them out of the darkness. "We ought to go, darling," she said at last. "People will think we are lovers."

"Heaven forefend," Dave grinned. "But I wanted to tell you about chance." He had been thinking about the chipmunk.

But Dolly had her hand over his mouth. "No, no, no," she wailed. "My ears are bruised and so are my insides. I can't take another word, mortal or immortal."

"All right," Dave said. He hauled his body erect in the seat, hauled his mood erect with it. "Let's drive off to the drunkening party. I'll be the only playboy of the western world," he chanted. "Synge! There's another man for you. What's in these Irish, anyway?"

The girl who admitted them at the Strowbridge house was one of Dave's students, acting as maid for the afternoon. Her smile was welcoming and glad-to-see. "Hello, Lois," Dave said.

"Hello, Mr. Marsh. Ladies upstairs, Mrs. Marsh." She pointed.

Dolly stood smiling as the girl helped Dave off with his coat, watching the swift slender arms, downed with gold and a thin patina of summer's tan still lingering, and wishing, with a little stab, that she were that young once more, that lovely.

"Are you a maid, Lois?" Dave asked.

Smiling, the girl spread her arms wide in the white uniform, his gloves in one hand, his coat over the other. "Can't you see I'm a maid?"

"I mean are you literally a maid?" She stared at him, then the slow suffusing wave of rose followed her understanding, climbed from chest to throat to cheeks. Then she spun and headed for the coat closet under the steps. "Honestly!" she flung furiously over her shoulder.

Grinning, Dave helped Dolly off with her coat and piled it in her arms. "Everybody loves you, darling," she assured him, "but behave yourself. Don't be merely *gauche*." Standing, they saw the party had fanned out by sexes on either side of the hall, the roar, the tweed, the smoke in the library on the left, the chatter, the crepe, the smoke in the dining room on the right.

Dave headed toward the dining room. "I'll finesse this in a hurry, first," he said.

Dolly began to climb the stairs with her coat. At the landing she leaned over and called in a loud stage whisper, "Lois!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes?" The young head emerged from the closet, still rosy, and a bit rumpled now from contact with hanging coats.

Dolly cupped her hands around her mouth. "Are you a maid?"

The girl mimicked her gesture. "Damn right!" she whispered loudly. "But ask me again Monday." She giggled, and Dolly, smiling, continued up the stairs. Then, "Mrs. Marsh!" stopped her again.

"Yes?"

"Are you a maid?" Dolly shook her head slowly, amply, tragically. Then the two of them stood poised for a moment, smiling, threading their mingled mischief, their mingled feminine destiny, on the taut invisible silver wire that angled from blue eye to blue eye. Then the girl caught up a tray from the settle and Dolly mounted to the bedroom.

There she saw the same canopied and quilted four-poster, the same mahogany highboy and walnut blanket chest, the same huge oval braided rug she had seen once a year for the past four years. What the Home magazines call 'a few really good old pieces', she reflected wryly. Then, in the bathroom, she told her reflection in the mirror, And the thing that's eating you, you bitch, is that they're not yours. She took a handkerchief from her purse, wrung it out in hot water and bathed her eyes, then repeated with cold. Then she draped the handkerchief on the edge of the tub to dry. "Don't forget it, now," she said aloud.

On the way downstairs she decided to brave the dining room first—the Star Chamber, she mused. And at the foot of the stairs stood her hostess, a Martini in one hand, a Manhattan in the other. "Hello, Molly darling," she saluted. "I've been laying for you. Which will it be?"

"Hello, Mrs. Strowbridge," Dolly said. "It's so nice to be here again." She accepted the Martini. "Thanks, this will do fine."

"Molly, you must call me Isabelle. I've been telling you that for years. Or Izzy, as Arthur calls me."

Or Bellie? Dolly wondered idly. Still, she liked this silly, honest woman. "All right," she said, "I'll do it." Mrs. Strowbridge swept on toward the library. Dolly took a large gulp of her cocktail and with it electric inside her she walked, feeling automatically convicted, into the dining room where the wives of the men teachers and maidens of age and middle age were in noisy, refined session. She found them gathered loosely in chairs at the end of the long

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

refectory-style walnut table, sipping sherry or coffee, munching canapes and little chocolate cakes.

Elsie Singer was in the middle of a story, and she and the others nodded and smiled to Dolly as she took a chair at the edge of the group. Dolly lifted a canape to her nose, caught the sharp, finny musk of anchovies, and popped the whole thing into her mouth. Chewing sedately, she listened. "That summer, coming back on the boat, I was so tired I swore I wasn't going to move a muscle. So I did something I'd been wanting to do for years. I read all the plays of Shakespeare from start to finish in chronological order. I'd never read them that way. So I'd sit out in the deck chair soaking up the sun and reading that big one-volume Shakespeare hour after hour after hour. Finally I noticed a man watching me. I diagnosed him as a business man, a southerner. Every time he passed me he'd look at me out of the corner of his eye, like this." She burlesqued the man's elaborate subterfuge, and the little circle about the table tinkled appreciatively. "Finally one day he came right up to me. 'What're you doin',' he says. 'I'm reading,' I says. 'I know,' he says, 'but what're you tryin' to *prove*?' "

Dolly laughed with them, against her will. It *was* a funny story. " 'What're you tryin' to *prove*,' " echoed Rachel Archer, chuckling. What indeed? Dolly thought. She looked at Rachel Archer's evil, fallen, red-veined, ugly old once-lovely face under the beautiful blue-white hair. But that face is wrong, too, Dolly thought. She isn't evil, really. It's just that she's for herself. Is it being unmarried that does that to them? Being always one, one being always everything? When there's no man to love, you love substitutes—other women, or dead men, or abstractions. You love Shakespeare, or 'poetry', or 'the novel'.

So, she wondered drably, how are they different from the rest of us? She ought to move, she knew; she didn't feel good where she was. She drained her cocktail in a long swallow and walked across the hall to the library, holding the olive in her mouth, salt and delicious.

She met Arthur Strowbridge in the library doorway on his way out. "Nice to see you, Dolly," he said, shaking her hand violently. "I've been talking to Dave, he'll tell you about it." And he hustled off, little, round and gray, leaving the displacement of his big voice behind him in the hall. Dolly paused in the doorway, her heart jumping a bit. What did that mean? Could they be offering Dave his job again? Then she put it away as impossible, and was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glad of it, now. What would he do if they invited him back after all? Accept, no doubt, for their sake—hers and Betsy's—and hate himself from then on more than ever. She didn't want that to have even an opportunity to happen. Then, knowing this was a lie too, she moved on before the truth could grow.

Inside the room she smiled greetings to three little clots of furiously lounging men, and waved across to Dave where he stood on the hearth between Frank Phelps and Helga Toller. He started to throw her a kiss, using first the right hand holding a cocktail, then finishing the gesture with the left hand holding a cigarette. To her right Dolly saw old Parker Cole sitting like a benign tumor on the couch against the wall, his big shaggy white head—the head that so ornamented every academic procession of the year—just visible over the top of the book behind which he slumped. He would sit thus, the numb, unmoving hub of the room's whirling deceptions, until his wife, who was religious and given to visions, tapped him gently on the shoulder and led him to the car. Between them they would drive it home, somehow.

Dolly walked past him, resisting the urge to pat the shaggy head. She smiled hello to Roger Farnsley's devasted, beautiful face, broken-nosed and aqua-eyed, stopped long enough to let him rhapsodize over her dress, and moved on to her husband's group at the fireplace. She would return to Roger later; he mystified and pleased her. Frank and Helga greeted her calmly. They were friends of hers, she believed. It was very hard to know. She put her empty glass on a tray carried by one student, accepted a demitasse of strong black coffee from another, and stood quietly, getting oriented to the talk.

"I was just going to tell these . . . these *ears* about chance." Dave gestured grandly.

"Chance, of all things," Dolly said.

Dave laughed and gripped her elbow. "Dolly wouldn't let me finish on the way in," he explained. "I'd gotten rid of war and poverty, but she shut me up before I could take care of chance."

"That seems an awful shame," Helga laughed.

"What a fine, free, philosophical life you two must lead out there in the country," Frank said.

"Oh, most of the time it's prosaic enough," Dolly said drily. "He takes this kind of thing by spells."

"I'll tell you about chance now, with illustrations," Dave said.

"Sound pedagogy," Frank marveled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes. Now here's what I'm thinking about, and you can tell me what's to be done about it." He stooped to stub out his cigarette on the ball of the andiron. "I once saw a chunk of ice that must have weighed fifty pounds fall off the cornice of an eight-story building. It missed a woman walking on the sidewalk by about two feet. When I shouted at her she looked insulted."

"Maybe she thought you had thrown it at her," Helga suggested.

"Probably." Dave did a quick double-take, then resumed. "Then again I saw a delivery man loading bread in a big basket at the back of his truck—doing nothing, just loading bread. A car went through a red light at the corner, and another car hit the first one broadside and knocked it around and into the man loading bread. He was cut almost in two. He never even saw either car."

Helga looked a little sick. "Spare us, Dave," she said angrily. "What's the point?"

Dave's face was set stubbornly. "You've got to face up to these things. That's what I've been trying to say all day."

"I don't know whether I do or not," Helga answered.

"Have you got a point, Dave?" Dolly asked.

"I'm trying to define chance, that's all. Be quiet a minute. Now here's another. I saw a truck go around a corner with a little boy sitting on the tailgate. He wasn't expecting the turn, and he tumbled head over heels across the tailgate. But just at the end there was a loose chain dangling, and somehow he caught hold of that, and I watched him clear out of sight, swinging in midair on the chain like a doll on the end of a little girl's arm. That helpless. Now, do you think he pulled through?"

"I imagine he pulled through all right," Frank said soberly.

"You're right," Dave said. "The very next day I saw the same kid on roller skates knocking a tin can along the gutter. Now," he continued, "consider the chipmunks."

"I'm going to consider somebody else for a while," Helga said, and moved to leave them.

Dave took hold of her arm. "Wait," he pleaded, "I'm almost through. Listen. One day last summer the cat brought a chipmunk to the back door. He looked dead, but I wrapped him up and put him in a basket, and after a while I heard him stirring around, and I put him outdoors and he ran off merry as a grig."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's a grig?" Dolly asked.

"I don't know," he grinned. "Sort of a thing people are merry as, I guess. Anyway, the very next day the cat came in with another chipmunk, or maybe even the same one again. This one looked to be in fine shape, and I made the cat let him go. When he got loose he started up a tree, and then I saw he was trailing a foot and a half of intestine."

"Ugh," Helga said.

"Yes, ugh," Dave said. "But I'd give a year of my life to know what happened to that chipmunk."

Frank laughed. "Which year, Dave?"

"Next year, maybe?" Dolly suggested quietly.

"Next year is good," Dave said, looking at her soberly. She saw it had been out of his mind, and she was sorry she had said it. Frank and Helga looked at their feet, shifted them embarrassedly.

"What *are* you going to do next year, Dave?" Frank asked gently.

Dave attempted nonchalance. "I'm going to write. Capital W."

"Yes," Dolly said, "we'll eat the paper."

"No, seriously," Dave pursued. "I was thinking of a character just the other day. The Man Who Was Tired of Writing in Margins. Me. Autobiographical. I'm tired of writing in the margins of students' papers. I'm going to get me some clean white paper and I'm going to write all the way down the middle of every sheet. Leave a big wide virgin margin at each side." They laughed, relieved to have a reason.

"The plain fact is we don't know what we'll be doing after this year," Dolly said. Why not let them savor it a while?

"Yes," Dave said, "I guess that's a very plain fact indeed."

"I wish you were going to be here, Dave," Frank said. "I wish you weren't going."

But Dolly was ashamed. "Let's don't agitate it," she broke in. "This is all old stuff, Besides," she continued brightly, "Dave can go to work for his father, any time he wants to. He's got a business in Cleveland now."

"Madam," Dave said, "that is no solution. I'd rather pick shit with the chickens." He bowed to Helga. "Begging your pardon, Ma'am. That's a homely phrase I learned down in Kentucky. But it's sincerely meant."

"Suppose Betsy and I don't have your appetite for that . . . that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chicken stuff," Dolly said. She was suddenly tired, sick, wornout. She had had too much of every face in the room, including, for the moment, her husband's. She faced him squarely. "I'm bored with you," she said. "I'm going away. Come and get me when you want to go." Nobody said anything. She took a step and then returned. "Get him to tell you about love," she said furiously to Frank and Helga. "Get him to tell you about how he used to whistle outside Markie Downing's window and she would come out with nothing on but a trench coat."

She wheeled and left. She squeezed the hand Helga put out to restrain her and walked on feeling drained and unsteady with her anger. But before she had reached the doorway it was dissipated by shame, shame that she had had no place to put her anger but in her husband, the legal, inevitable place. She turned in the doorway and threw Dave a crooked smile. He had been waiting for it and acknowledged it with the wave she had known would be there. He probably *will* tell them about Markie, too, she thought, grinning inwardly.

After that she felt cleaner, but still very tired. In the dining room she plucked Mrs. Strowbridge's sleeve and drew her aside. "Isabelle, I know it's awful, but do you think I might go upstairs and lie down for a few minutes?"

"Why, honey you're not . . . not sick or . . . anything?" Her look was terrified.

Dolly reassured her. "No, no, it's just that I'm awfully tired, and Dave's having such a good time I don't like to drag him away."

By now Isabelle Strowbridge rather liked the idea. She bustled Dolly toward the door, whispering. "You go right up to the guest room and close the door and take off your shoes and stretch out. I'll tell Dave where you are."

At the foot of the stairs she met Lois coming down. Dolly patted her shoulder as they passed. "Hi, Lois," she said, abstractedly. The words bounced in her head as she moved tonelessly up the stairs. She felt as if she were asleep before she touched the bed, before she closed the door.

She woke slowly and blindly, and explored the covers for a moment with her fingers, with a rudimentary sense of panic. Then the parts of her slipped smoothly into place and she lay still a minute yawning. She felt wonderful, new. At last she switched on the lamp by the bed and looked at her watch. She had slept

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just over an hour. She listened, trying to interpret the stage of the party by its sound. But the house was quiet except for low music somewhere.

She rose and went in to use the bathroom. She washed her hands in warm water, then ran cold water into the basin and washed her face. She saw someone had left a handkerchief to dry on the edge of the bathtub, and wondered briefly whose it might be. There were no initials.

Downstairs the rooms were still brightly lighted but there was no one in sight. She followed the music to the kitchen. There she found the three girls washing dishes while Dave, tilted back in an old kitchen chair facing the door, plunked slow chords on a guitar. He smiled at her, a slow, sleepy, contented smile. Lois lifted soapy hands from the water and swiped the hair away from her eyes with a bent wrist. "Hi, Mrs. Marsh. Good nap? Everybody's gone. The Strowbridges went out to dinner. Pooped, I guess."

"Ain't nobody here but us chickens," Dave added.

Dolly stood still, her hands on his shoulders, liking the scene, the girls in their white dresses, the graceful, weary, old young man cradling the polished wood. She stooped and kissed him on the forehead. "Let's go home, Chanticleer," she said gently.

"Okay," he said. "I called home. Emmie is going to give Betsy some supper, and Betsy has agreed to go to bed if we come in and kiss her when we get home. I talked to her." He grinned. "I think we ought to render up Careless Love for these maids before we go, don't you?"

"Couldn't we just pour a libation or something?"

"No, come on. Dogpatch style."

So they sang the song, then left, shutting the door on the laughter and the soapy applause of the three girls.

They drove fairly fast, but carefully, and both of them were quiet. There seemed little that needed to be said, or was possible to say. Dolly half-drowsed. She felt something unidentified moving slowly upward through the layers of her mind to the surface. Then, when it hit the top, it was dancing. "Allspice!" she shouted, laughing. It was the thing she'd been trying all day to remember to tell him.

"What?" Dave said.

"Allspice," Dolly said. "Betsy is making up a story about a character named Allspice."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He ruminated it a moment, then chuckled. "Allspice. Last name?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like a Henry James character. What's the first name?"

"She hasn't got that far."

"Male or female?"

"I don't know. I doubt if she has decided yet."

"Let's make up some first names," he suggested.

"Okay. You start."

He thought a moment, seriously. "Archie?"

She considered that. She tried it aloud. "Archie Allspice. . . . No, I don't think so. It ought to be three syllables, and it ought to be neutral, somehow, to counteract the spice."

"Roderick?" he proffered after a bit.

"Not bad," she said. "Roderick is good. Roderick Allspice."

"Let's get him a consort," he suggested.

Dolly thought. "Cynthia?"

"Perfect," he said. "Little did Roderick and Cynthia Allspice reck, that cerulean April morning. . . ."

They laughed and fell back comfortably into silence. "Dave," Dolly said finally, picking her tone carefully, "what *are* we going to do next year?"

The answer came so swiftly that she knew it was no good, one of the prepared ones they'd already rehearsed threadbare. "I don't know, honey, but I'm not worried. Jobs will turn up this summer." Their mutual silence testified to the hollowness of this. Then slowly, more heavily, "That's not true, I guess. I learned something today, I think."

This required something of her, but she couldn't quite give it yet.

"Nothing really startling, but still sort of hard to face. I was trying to talk to Enid Bauer about Dryden. It came over me after a while that I really didn't have anything to say—nothing but a set of commonplaces." He interrupted her protest. "There are two ways of making good in this profession, Dolly. The really good men can do it on the quality of their brains. The crooks do it by bootlicking. What I woke up to, talking to Enid, was that I'm not smart enough to make it honestly, and I'm not crooked enough to make it by politicking."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A man doesn't do this, Dolly thought tensely. It's mediocrity he's confessing to. He mustn't do it; it will kill him.

"I guess it's a stalemate," Dave was saying, somewhere to her left. Then, while her mind manipulated and discarded the old reassurances, and Dave's voice rambled dumbly on, her eyes registered the static tableau ahead. The lights of the car picked out two dogs on either shoulder of the road, both mongrels, both patchy black and white. They seemed to have just become aware of each other, for they stood in sharp, identical attitudes, ears cocked, noses dedicated to each other's mystery, each with a paw uplifted. Like bookends, she thought. Could she say that, perhaps, to her husband, the failure? 'Dave, those dogs look like bookends.'

The dog on the left had sat down on his haunches now, but the other had lowered his lifted paw and taken a tentative, challenging step.

Then the car was past the spot. The shock was tiny—infinitesimal, really. Probably there hadn't even been a shock. If anything it had been a rut in the road, she didn't even need to look back. But when she looked he was there, as she had known he would be, a little twitching black bundle under the streetlight.

"Dave," she said, "we hit that dog." Her voice broke just short of a sob.

"What?" he said, "Are you sure?" He pulled to the side of the road and stopped the car, the motor idling, and looked back to where she pointed. "Oh God," he moaned, "God, God, God." He turned the key and sat still a moment, hunched defensively. Then he climbed heavily out and walked heavily back toward the target of watery white with the black bullseye.

Dolly looked back, once, at the man bending over the dead dog, at the rough dark pyramid of sorrow they made, massive and distorted under the light. She didn't want to look again. He might even be crying, she thought, he's capable of it. There was no need to look, the scene was incised on the pulp of her eyelids, where she would be able to see it any time she wanted to, or when she didn't.

Dolly pulled her coat collar tight around her ears, as if she were cold, or as if the scene were actually audible. Ah . . . how tired she was, and how bewildered. Somewhere inside her was a continent of sadness too deep for sleep to touch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHIRLEY FREISINGER

To Those Canopic Ladies

Listen you old women who'll dress me dead
And sing (I've heard you) while my corpse decays,
The scattered memoranda of my days
Envolumed in death's leather to be read
By mourners merit recitativo dread
But not your singing—you will surely raise
Me—this dead one loves music more than praise,
So, like stele women mute for me instead.

I have my rights in death and do decree
Your horn hands gently close the linen lids
That encase my eyes' arrested heraldry.
But do not look long on frozen majesty—
The swan rousant may vivid up in me
And this that no-escutcheon death forbids.

Quid Dubitas?

When Jesus smuggled home from death he wrenched the blessed
Eleven strange as driftwood in their violated hut
While the sea ishmael outside beat its hollow breast.
He saw not arks of apostles but wooden men shut
From men by strangeness they were not strange enough to guest,
Each hutting his humanity in a warmth of hut,
Each kindling fish and honeycomb in his brazier breast,
They sat accused by one finger-lamp to point their dark,
Self-snug against the flood of men in their grounded ark,
Cold saints turned warm fishermen against God manifest,
While he felt a sea ishmael brash in his hollow breast
And he raised the jetty of his hand against their crest
Of white stares and murmurs that fell foaming in the dark:

"Does the wave of my return upturn you startled skiffs
To dash me over? Ah, cling to your humanity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Where can I cling, derelict of death? Upon your reefs
Of words? Or tossed among your nets of sanity
Like a monster inedible to your beliefs?
I galed three-days-death while you lagooned in self-pity,
Nor will your port of tears harbor my mortality. . .
Come, Peter, fling the drag of light, let me be assessed,
Did my absence so feed you I am your spoiling guest?"

"Oh, Lord, we did not know you so cauled you are by death. . . ."

"Oh, Peter, still denying with faceless shibboleth?"

"Oh, Lord, in your lock of wounds let my finger key. . . ."

"Oh, Thomas, my wealth of blood will pay you poorer fee
Than if you loved my wealth of impossibility. . . ."

In each saint's gehenna the devil was entuned
As Thomas turned his finger key in each lock of wound,
Though red with reality, surely he went poorer,
And in each saint's gehenna the devil went surer,
While in their creche-clear eyes the child in them all lay ruined.

Again at Tiberias on the harsh-ribbed wave
The crow-skiff of apostles picked for flesh to eat
But the ocean clattered bony as the fleshless grave,
When from the shore the voice called, "Children, have you meat?"
And the flesh rose placably on the mean-ribbed wave.
And who but Jesus sat ashore by a fire's heat
Inviting his fishermen fantastically to eat
With him who rose as spar from wreckage of the grave?
He cast their fish like cold runes onto the fire's heat
And if he read their cold hearts' mystery, forgave,
And ate to prove himself no gauntling from the grave:
"Let this bread reality feed the spirit meat
But know there is a mystery whatever you shall eat."

Did he feel futures opening like rooms in his breast
And see us fantastics feeding our mortality,
Each heart clenched like a fist on bread reality

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With always the gaunt fantastic for our spoiling guest,
Each saviour of the other that crypts in each man's breast
By a whole stone of the world morbidly suppressed?
Did he see us forever turning our fingers' key
In each other's lock of wounds to thieve a mystery?

The First Dilettante

Not guiltless gray but poppies helled with wisdom were Athene's eyes,
Her brow with thought was staffed so high the thoughtless curls could hardly scale it
And the cymbals of her armor crashed no shrewder than her armored wit,
But among more notable muses she was a mute in paradise
For there is no music in wisdom and, being wise, she knew it,
Nor could she break her majolica throat and brokenly vocalize
Or threaten orage to the sullen lyre with the plectrum of her wit,
And that spear with which she struck notes of fear could poorly improvise,
While her snake though fretted with silver scales was for music counterfeit,
And the owl that cleffed her high shoulder was tuned but to moralize. . . .

So she toppled the drum of her helmet in which high thoughts were beating,
Her simple snake like an arabesque she flung to Olympian air
And unwound from the armor on which Medusa sang mad fugues of hair,
And lissomed informal as a wind in her chiton's formal fluting
And prided herself no tangling wisdoms save riddles of her hair,
Ignoring involvements of her snake or her owl's pedantic hooting,
Ignoring the muses' accomplished laughter on the innocent air
As down to earth she unparadised for a music of unmuting,
So proud in her humility, oh let the trembling art beware—
A goddess informalled for music in her chiton's formal fluting. . . .

She landed where grass calliopes quavered to untutored breeze

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And populous hydrangea enlisted to tarantara of sun
While soundlessly some instrumental cows were played by a river's run
Beneath the cymbal on cymbal leaves of oversolicitous trees
Whose birds were tossing pebbles of song into highest oblivion.
The goddess hummed against grasses high in hope of calliopes,
And she sighed against hydrangea to outmartial the blare of sun
But alas, all were mute as manuscripts read dry by rustic breeze,
So she trembled with music unspilled by the river's prodigal run
And raging struck the cows who fled with chromatic sonorities

While she shook the trees so championly the discus birds won space
And the leaves sang orient dissonance around her classic ears
As down she sank to the mocking grass among lost worlds of her tears—
A goddess too unmotived to astound this virtuoso place.
Small Eros trebled down to soothe but he was small balm to careers,
His arrowing smiles too aimless to win a goddess losing face,
"Oh, I should have come more proud," she cried, "batoned them snakes and spears,
"And so have given music to this world by force if not by grace,
"What has simplicity afforded me but this expense of tears?"
In rosy weather of his wings Eros shivered at her sunset face.

"I broke the fly in amber of contentment; it stung me to the heart,
"For the insect was ambition—more felicitous when preserved.
"I longed that a teak oblivion with the pearl of praise be verved
"And that stark column of wisdom, I, might be fluted into art!"
So in her mirroring tears she lay looking small as she deserved
While Eros magnified himself in those tear lenses from her heart
And though only a dwarf called Love, largely kept his opinion reserved.
He flew discreeter than a dove to a diplomatic branch apart
From where this amazon of wisdom lay intricately unnerved
By her sympathetic foray into unsympathetic art.

Night fell in blue accordion tones; Athene lay soundless on the ground,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rash stars dared their tremolo, being courageously immature,
But the moon dull with experience, wisely muffled his old tambour
As he heard a goddess catch in the throat of night without a sound.
The stave-cold branches wavered beneath the sleeping birds' fioriture
And leaves like infinite little tongues lapped the river of air around
Where Eros slept in his basket wings (Love least supported, most secure)
Undreaming art while night winds made the zithers of his hairs resound.
Only that columnar wisdom, she, shaken with dreams of amateur,
Lay in this music like a crumpled rest on her empty staff the ground.

That moment when dawn's organ loft impending a preludium blue
Is shattered by the raw white note of the neophyte morning star,
Athene felt upon the ground a branch so hollowed by the scar
Of worm, ambition, even hope, its harshnesses were mellowed through,
And lifting it to learned lips she breathed her heart's vernacular
Till down its woody haunted halls her music's ghost wailed a debut,
While down the archives of Athene doors flew foolishly ajar
And out fled wisdom, lore, and legend, but the dwarfish music grew
Till organ sun that booms its fugue of days, the awesome calendar,
Froze the grand pedals while timeless Athene belittled time as she blew.

Her music's snakes she conjured whirling, whispering from their wooden nest,
Mare-eared the leaves flew to her song, wild-horsed the river snuffled shore,
Rondino flights of dove hung still as wreathes in honor to her soar
And those dull tympani the cows resounded whirlwind in the breast,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Herself she felt a tower of flesh to hold a god unknown in lore,
With music's ivy round her granite heart remorselessly impressed,
Sometimes she was ivory Aphrodite with arms white urns that store
The ashes dead of many loves, sometimes ebony Ceres obsessed
By her great drum of earth, or father Zeus making heaven's quarry roar
And yield one vein of lightning's perfect quartz among the ruined rest,
Sometimes she was a waterfall of trees to trickle birds before,
Sometimes a foundry too iron for the filigree notes in her breast.

Suddenly a gourd-like laughter shook its tiny seeds above her head,
Athene of the enchanted bough withered in her music's rain,
She lowered her foundling instrument and looked up goddessly in pain
Where Eros like a melon split with laughter uninhibited
While she was knitting up anger among her music's broken skein:
"Should Love not turn, as turn he must, to sympathy?" the goddess said,
"You that pitied my silence find my musics merely entertain?
"Did that which occupied all nature leave you uninhabited?"
"Goddess, it was not your music my burst of self could not contain,
"Come let the river show you why Love laughs," the rippling Eros said,

As in the halter of his arms he led her where the waters flowed,
"Now take your haunted bough and play but look in the river's second sight. . . ."
Indeed she blew her venom through the wooden adder more in spite
Than art, the four winds braided and upbraided all in the Phrygian mode,
But oh—her image in the water—is it worked by some wry sprite
That her eyes once gray-imperial leap from their lashes like a toad
From startled leafage, that her mouth should simper and her cheeks once white—
Complacent puff and anger like worlds at war, all in the Phrygian mode?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She stopped, "Oh, fatal bough that makes me such a Gorgon to
the sight,
"Must you that made me also Orpheus to flawless air corrode

"My features? Who can embrace your art that makes the artist
ugly,
"Devious bough, through which my song makes plain while I am
made involved,
"And you, old Nature, monolith indifference I thought my art
dissolved,
"Did you hear this unnatural singer more in terror than amity?
"Bough and song, I renounce you, and the beach-like loneliness
you involved
"Where my flesh in tides receded to leave the heart's shell of me
only
"Singing on my ribs—return now, flesh, in your wave let it be
dissolved
"Past singing—so, this Wisdom returns to Olympus heartlessly. . ."
With Eros she flew, by effort uncorrupted, by art uninvolved,
Far from gnarling music she composed herself, the first dilettante.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RICHARD HOWARD

Five Poems for Pierre de Ronsard

Éloge de Glauce à Scylle, Nimphe Dansante

Eyelids flicker to create
A flame upon her cheek.
Phosphors palpitate
As I speak

And my lady is lifted
By a darker dancer;
Quick and explicit, as if in answer
Ardor has shifted

Flesh, deployed the bone—
So would she discommode
The body to bright stone
Alive: a line, a node

Until before me as I stayed
A salamander careless played
And lay and shrank not from the fire:
Tis Venus' worm, and represents desire.

Tu Es Savante, Doulce et Vertueuse

Gather up the growth of day
Dressed in summer, silk, and scent,
Indolent lady.

Grey and blue veils fall away:
Are you the greenest continent,
Tropical lady?

Ripe the human colors lay
Where she fell impenitent,
Declining lady.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Seule Vous Serez Ma Dernière Avanture

Lounging maples will arrange
Our fall: the greenest hinge

Of summer once undone, there is
A god no longer in the weather's house.

Have we not seen how maples, red
Or leaking gold as if in blood,

Swung on their spindles, slackened,
Spun, and fell in cadence likened

To a bright and blurred chorale,
Comic colors at a festival?

Ressemblances Dans Une Grotte Garnie de Bivalves

How easy, in the cavern, where we lay
Dividing lavish senses into clay

And darkness, to extemporize a world.
The crusted shells, for instance, curled

Around the iridescence of their cause—
Were they not likenesses, a soft applause

Of matter at its own sure imagery
Collected in the cavern where we lay?

Imagine the oysters there (whose slippery ears
Were seemings of our own), some pink and clear

Or pale as any further flesh of yours,
And others reddened as if from the source

Of cordial rhythms in a qualm of cold:
They were our semblances, the conjured world

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of lovers in a quiet place; yet one
Sweet mollusc in that clammy cave, upon

Comparison . . .
comparisons are dumb.

Les Deux Amants Dessous le Vent d'Autumne

"Chaos of Archaic Change": a garden
And a garden faun, ingloriously streaked
Or else beneath the lindens cracked
By saturated leaves, the burden

Of a dropping season and a grey—
Prophesying, I should say, a bitter
Sequel to the old weeks' weather
And our burning time of day:

Leaves and hours will fail together,
Ruined on the bright pond water.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAC HAMMOND

Where the Tall Corn Grows

Over drumlands all the trees of Iowa green
Made me wish the glaciers had not melted
On Missouri's head, but pushed southward
Past even Tennessee to Texas' Gulf
And left its black silt to salt the continent
And grow all verdure that green.

In Iowa leaves higgle for color and highness
And fall from peers of summer's green:
So red is the sumac on the copper-coated oak
The trees, the trees in a seasonal trish-trash
Are God's covenant on terrestial destruction
But for its blues, its arch, and highness.

In winter how they so naked stand
And clip and chip about their sometime green
And point their sapless lumber in a limber highness:
As a child I used to act their human numbness
And feeling like trees over and over
Would chatter and so, naked stand.

In spring by one and one leaves reappear
In pushes of royal green green
And that same child I was would beg their highness
To bend a fragile crown down where I stand
And anoint me with an Iowa's April rain.
Sceptered now with memory I reappear,

Hoisting up a trunk, along the limbs
To twigs, to leaves, undone with green,
And see from an Iowa tree's green highness
Iowa, her endless drumlands, this year's stand
Of grain, her Indian maize plainly appear,
And free my homely limbs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Life Cycle

Dropped on velvet leaves
The stuff you swallow down
Impetuously weaves
Too long a ragged gown,
Moth, Moth, forming eye.

With your many legs and feet
Eating up and down
Your forest street
You'll grow a better gown,
Moth, Moth, glutted eye.

The careful house you spin
Will silken all your dress;
Yourself all builded in,
Now beautiless,
Moth, fading eye. Now

Your curled horns are black
And rainbows overflow
Your velvet back;
Your lust is go, go,
Moth, glittering eye.

Whirling round in flame
With love's exhaustable excess
You end your dressing game
In tatteredness,
Moth, Moth, vanishing eye.

But your pale embalmed wings,
Caught, pinned, and set,
As this poem sings,
Are fluttering yet,
Moth, Moth, polished eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HERBERT READ

The True Voice of John Keats

KEATS CAME TO THE PROBLEM OF POETIC FORM without any of the philosophical equipment of either Coleridge or Wordsworth: came to it and came nearer to solving it in terms of conscious poetic technique. To such a statement I would like to add this preliminary qualification: when we accuse Keats of a lack of philosophical equipment we are not expressing a qualitative judgment. Keats had something infinitely more rare and precious than a trained discursive faculty—something which we must be content to call innate wisdom. Wisdom is of general scope, and the fact that on the present occasion we are going to adjust our focus to a technical matter should not blind us to the fact that the light Keats sheds on our problem is part of a wider beam. There never was an English poet, save Shakespeare, who had so instinctive a grasp of poetic realities: of the function of poetry in the life of the mind. In his short life he had no time to solve the formal problem, but the story of his experiment is full of interest. The texts, which come from his Letters[1], are almost too well-known to be repeated, but it would be rash to assume that their significance has been exhausted. The most important of them comes from a letter of 27 February, 1818, written to John Tyler, to whom he had sent the proofs of the newly-written *Endymion:*

> It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome Prejudices in reading my Verses—that affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular Passage. In *Endymion* I have most likely but moved into the Go-cart from the leading strings. In Poetry I have a few Axioms, and you will see how far I am from their Centre. 1st. I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance—2nd. Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun come natural to him—shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight—but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it—and this leads me to another axiom. That

[1] *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Maurice Buxton Forman. Oxford (Fourth Edition, 1952). A selection of these letters based on the 1947 edition, ed. with an introduction by Lionel Trilling, was recently published by Farrar, Straus and Young (Great Letters Series).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries with 'O for a Muse of fire to ascend!'

To this passage the editor of the *Letters*, Maurice Buxton Forman, added a useful footnote:

> Bailey informed Lord Houghton, that one of Keats's favourite topics of conversation was the principle of melody in verse, which he believed to consist in the adroit management of open and close vowels. He had a theory that vowels could be as skilfully combined and interchanged as differing notes of music, and that all sense of monotony was to be avoided, except when expressive of a special purpose. Uniformity of metre is so much the rule of English poetry, that, undoubtedly, the carefully varied harmonies of Keats's verse were disagreeable, even to cultivated readers, often producing exactly the contrary expression from what was intended, and, combined as they were with rare and curious rhymes, diverted the attention from the beauty of the thoughts and the force of the imagery. In "Endymion", indeed, there was much which not only seemed, but was, experimental; and it is impossible not to observe the superior mastery of melody, and sure-footedness of the poetic paces, in "Hyperion".'

Endymion, a poem of 4,051 lines, was written between April and September, 1817, and published at the end of April, 1818, with an apologetic Preface. Keats called the poem "a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished". He used the word "mawkishness", which his critics were only too ready to adopt. The *Quarterly Review's* article appeared in September, 1818, and on the ninth of October we find Keats writing calmly to James Augustus Hessey about the defects of the poem[2]—"the slip-shod Endymion" he called it:

> It is as good as I had power to make it, by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble—I will write independently.—I have written independently *without Judgment*. I may write independently, and *with Judgment* hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself.

[2]But in April (in a letter to John Taylor, his publisher), he had professed himself satisfied—"the book pleased me much—it is very free from faults; and although there are one or two words I should wish replaced, I see in many places an improvement greatly to the purpose." But Keats is perhaps speaking here of the typographical appearance of the book.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This passage, and particularly the last sentence, is sufficient to identify Keats with the romantic principle. This principle was the basis of his own dissatisfaction with *Endymion,* and it becomes of the greatest interest, therefore, to trace the further evolution of his poetic practice.

If we ask ourselves what is the main defect of *Endymion,* we might agree that it is its diffuseness, its lack of a clear narrative line, of a precisely composed picture, of all the virtues which give great poetry its condensed clarity, its effect of a "crystallization" of thought. If we then seek the cause of this diffuseness, we should most likely find it in the process of swift facile rhyming. The composition jumps swiftly from rhyme to rhyme, and through keeping his eye on his steps, rather than raised to a particular direction, the poet travels in random curves. Take, for example, the description of Endymion in Book II (387-427):

> After a thousand mazes overgone,
> At last, with sudden step, he came upon
> A chamber, myrtle wall'd, embowered high,
> Full of light, incense, tender minstrelsy,
> And more of beautiful and strange beside:
> For on a silken couch of rosy pride,
> In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth
> Of fondest beauty; fonder, in fair sooth,
> Than sighs could fathom, or contentment reach:
> And coverlids gold-tinted like the peach,
> Or ripe October's faded marigolds,
> Fell sleek about him in a thousand folds—
> Not hiding up an Apollonian curve
> Of neck and shoulder, nor the tenting swerve
> Of knee from knee, nor ankles pointing light;
> But rather, giving them to the filled sight
> Officiously. Sideway his face repos'd
> On one white arm, and tenderly unclos'd,
> By tenderest pressure, a faint damask mouth
> To slumbery pout; just as the morning south
> Disparts a dew-lipp'd rose. Above his head,
> Four lily stalks did their white honours wed
> To make a coronal; and round him grew
> All tendrils green, of every bloom and hue,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Together intertwin'd and trammel'd fresh:
The vine of glossy sprout; the ivy mesh,
Shading its Ethiop berries; and woodbine,
Of velvet leaves and bugle-blooms divine;
Convolvulus in streaked vases flush;
The creeper, mellowing for an autumn blush;
And virgin's bower, trailing airily;
With others of the sisterhood. Hard by,
Stood serene Cupids watching silently.
One, kneeling to a lyre, touch'd the strings,
Muffling to death the pathos with his wings;
And, ever and anon, uprose to look
At the youth's slumber; while another took
A willow-bough, distilling odorous dew,
And shook it on his hair; another flew
In through the woven roof, and fluttering-wise
Rain'd violets upon his sleeping eyes.

This passage is as concrete and objective as any in the whole poem, but we may note how the image is blurred by irrelevances introduced for the sake of rhyme. After the two lines giving a fairly precise description of the chamber, we have the weak line:

And more of beautiful and strange beside

which adds nothing to the description, but provides a rhyme for "pride" in the next line. Three lines below we have the unnecessary interpolation "in fair sooth" to provide a rhyme for "youth". A peach must be introduced to rhyme with "reach", but Keats evidently felt that the image was a cliché, so added the more original and precise simile of "faded marigolds", which happily rhymed with the "folds" of the coverlids. And so on, throughout the passage, rhymes are seen begetting images, images begetting rhymes; and the regular metre stretches over it all like a net whose every mesh must be filled with a duly accented syllable.

But this, it may be said, is how poetry is written—how Spenser wrote the *Faerie Queene,* how Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis,* models which Keats had before him in composing *Endymion.* But for all its luscious monotony, its crystal brightness, the *Faerie Queene* can only be read intermittently, or as an academic exercise; and Shakespeare quickly abandoned the style of *Venus and Adonis.* For the same reasons Keats had to abandon a style

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too enervating for his energetic mind—a style which he felt deformed the poetic essence. He then turned to Milton as a model, and began his new long poem, *Hyperion,* in the unrhymed blank verse which Milton had used with such magical effect. With what result, we all know; Miltonics, as Keats called his new style, proved almost as unsatisfactory as the Spenserian style—indeed, the harm was much more insidious, for it was not a mere inflation of a natural mode of expression: it produced an organic deformation of language itself. The words in which Keats confessed his defeat (from a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, postmarked 22 September, 1819) are again well-known, but they may be recalled for they gain significance in our particular context:

> I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up.

And he then admits that he himself cannot distinguish, in *Hyperion,* between "the false beauty proceeding from art" and "the true voice of feeling".

With this statement one should compare a similar passage from the long journal-letter written to George and Georgiana Keats—this part of the letter apparently written on the same day as the letter to Reynolds:

> I shall never become attached to a foreign idiom so as to put it into my writings. The Paradise Lost though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production of the world. A northern dialect accommodating itself to greek and latin inversions and intonations.

In both letters he gives as a contrast to Milton, and as a genuine example of English poetic idiom, Thomas Chatterton. "He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in English words." And again: "The purest English I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's. The language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another sensation."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This denial or renunciation of Milton has seemed treacherous to most critics, so before we go on to observe the next and final stage of Keats's development, we should ask whether he meant what he said, and if the first version of *Hyperion* bears out his self-criticism.

Robert Bridges, who had a great admiration for Keats, as well as for Milton, thought that Keats was deceiving himself—that he was offering a superficial excuse for difficulties and defects of deeper seating. Bridges could admit the defects of *Endymion*:

> To one who expects to be carried on by the interest of the story, this poem is tedious and unreadable, and parts of it merit at least some of the condemnation which fell on the whole. Keats thought to 'surprise by a fine excess'; his excess rather confuses and blurs, and it is a severe task to keep the attention fixed. A want of definition in the actual narration,—so that important matters do not stand out,—a sameness in the variety, and the reiteration of languid epithets, are the chief causes of this. . . .[3]

Bridges's argument is that the defects of *Hyperion* are essentially of the same nature. It is not a question of style—the style, on the contrary, makes this poem "the only poem since Milton that has seriously challenged the epic place". What is wrong is that "the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest: like *Endymion*, it is all imagination . . . there is little but imagination, and a one-sidedness or incompleteness of that; a languor which lingers in the main design, though the influence of Milton is generally uplifting the language."

This attempt to divorce subject and style does not strike me as good critical procedure: it implies that a good story would support a bad style—that Miltonics or any other imitative style would not have mattered if the plot of *Hyperion* had been good enough. I would rather take the opposite view: like the music critic (I think it was Edward Dent) who said he did not mind what language an opera was sung in, so long as he did not understand it; so I would say that I am indifferent to the meaning or significance of a poet's story so long as the language is genuinely poetic. As an example of this extreme I would quote Pound's *Cantos*, which are hardly as perspicuous as *Hyperion*, but can be read with sustained poetic enjoyment. Bridges assumed that what

[3] *Collected Essays and Papers, etc.* IV. "A Critical Introduction to Keats". Oxford, 1929.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Keats mainly objected to in Milton was his inversions; and he advances a defence of inversion which shows once again (I am thinking of the obtuseness he displayed towards Hopkins' sprung rhythm) how far Bridges was from any understanding of the organic nature of poetic style. Inversion, he says,

> . . . is of the essence of good style. In ordinary speech the words follow a common order prescribed by use, and if that does not suit the sense, correction is made by vocal intonation: but the first thing that a writer must do is to get his words in the order of his ideas, as he wishes them to enter the reader's mind; and when such an arrangement happens not to be the order of common speech, it may be called a grammatical inversion. To take the simple case, the position of the adjective with regard to its substantive: in French it generally follows the substantive, and this is in most cases its proper place, and for this reason alone descriptions of scenery are generally more pictorial in French prose than in English, the necessary frequent predicates being in their natural position: in English the common use sets the epithet before the object, and when this is a malposition of ideas, a poet must invert either his grammar or his ideas; and what is true of adjectives is true also of every word in the sentence.

It may be that we have here a perfect expression of the radical difference that separates the classical poet and critic from the romantic poet and critic. For what Bridges is asserting is the priority, in poetry, of idea or discursive thought, and the consequent adaptation of poetic diction to "the order of ideas". What the romantic poets and critics assert, from Coleridge to Pound, is the priority of the verbal symbol, of the expressive phrase, which is spontaneous in origin and therefore does not *seek* a logical order of words, but is uttered as native, natural speech. Now, inversions are not altogether prohibited in natural speech: they are sometimes used instinctively for a particular expressive effect ("She's a beautiful girl, is Jane"; "A common thief, that's what he is!"). But such natural inversions are rare, and are never a deliberate re-shuffling of the natural order of words to fit a logical order of ideas, or a metrical pattern of syllables. They do not disrupt the native music, which is the true voice of feeling.

Let us now look more closely at the three stages in Keats's technical progress: the stages represented by *Endymion, Hyperion*, and *The Fall of Hyperion*. I have already quoted a passage from *Endymion* that is sufficiently representative. From *Hyperion* we might take the description of Hyperion at the end of Book II:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was Hyperion:—a granite peak
His bright feet touch'd, and there he stay'd to view
The misery his brilliance had betray'd
To the most hateful seeing of itself.
Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape, majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East:
Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp
He utter'd, while his hands contemplative
He press'd together, and in silence stood.
Despondence seiz'd again the fallen Gods
At sight of the dejected King of Day,
And many hid their faces from the light:
But fierce Enceladus sent forth his eyes
Among the brotherhood; and, at their glare,
Uprose Iäpetus, and Creüs too,
And Phorcus, sea-born, and together strode
To where he towered on his eminence.
There those four shouted forth old Saturn's name;
Hyperion from the peak loud answered 'Saturn!'
Saturn sat near the Mother of the Gods,
In whose face was no joy, though all the Gods
Gave from their hollow throats the name of 'Saturn!'

From *The Fall of Hyperion* any twenty lines would reveal the drastic change of texture: I take the famous passage that follows the unveiling of Moneta, lines 256-82:

Then saw I a wan face,
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
The lily and the snow; and beyond these
I must not think now, though I saw that face—
But for her eyes I should have fled away.
They held me back, with a benignant light,
Soft-mitigated by divinest lids

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
> Of all external things—they saw me not,
> But in blank splendor beam'd like the mild moon,
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
> What eyes are upward cast. As I had found
> A grain of gold upon a mountain's side,
> And twing'd with avarice strain'd out my eyes
> To search its sullen entrails rich with ore,
> So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,
> I ached to see what things the hollow brain
> Behind enwombed: what high tragedy
> In the dark secret Chambers of her skull
> Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
> To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
> Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
> With such a sorrow. . . .

I am tempted to go on, to include such a magnificent line as:

> The pale Omega of a wither'd race

or, five lines further on, the take-up of the familiar opening of *Hyperion:*

> Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
> Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
> Far from the fiery noon and Eve's one star. . . .

What are the major changes of style between these three passages? Bridges has already indicated the most obvious one—the omission of all invocatives. In *The Fall of Hyperion* there is not a single invocative "O", and Bridges shows how in comparable passages (*Hyperion,* I, 50-6 and *The Fall of Hyperion,* I, 352-8), the alterations are consequent on this change.

The vital changes, however, are more organic. The inversions have not gone—there is one in each of the first three lines of the passage quoted; there are nine or ten in 27 lines. A count in *Hyperion* would not yield a higher proportion, and I suspect that there are even less in *Endymion.* The excessive use of inversions in *Hyperion* comes from Milton: the most we might be able to claim for *The Fall of Hyperion* is that the inversions are generally determined by required emphasis, and not merely by the structure of a regular metre. But if we rewrite the first three lines of my quotation giving the words their natural order, what, if anything, is lost?:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then I saw a wan face
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but blanch'd bright
By an immortal sickness which does not kill. . . .

I see no violence to "the order of ideas" in such a restitution, and a positive gain in ease of diction.

Miltonics, however, is more than a question of invocations and inversions:

Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape, majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East. . . .

This is magnificent, but it is not Keats; and Keats knew that he was merely relaying another poet's voice, another poet's personal accent. The abstract music of exotic proper names, the sonorous and jewelled epithets, the ruthless syntax—the verse of art, apt for imitation and elaboration, but not the true voice of feeling!

Miltonic verse is the individual voice of Milton, and Keats felt that he had fallen into the most insidious of all traps—the mimicry of personal idiosyncrasies. The weakness of *Endymion* had been his own weakness—"mawkishness" he called it; but we can now call it verbal excess, induced by the rhyming structure, and by imprecision of diction. In *Hyperion* Keats avoided these weaknesses, but only by sacrificing his own sincerity, his valid sensation. In *The Fall of Hyperion* he would devote himself to another sensation—that is to say, he would try to be true to his own poetic sensation. Keats knew that poetry had to be tested on the poet's own pulse—that it had an affective and visceral basis betrayed by any merely superficial affectation of a traditional style.

The style, the poetic diction and vocal accent, of *The Fall of Hyperion* is at last his own—free and individual, moving isometrically round the contour of his thought, revealing the sensational structure of his poetic experience. The lines I have quoted are illustration enough of this delicate fluctuant measure, but I cannot resist quoting a further half-dozen lines in which the accent itself almost makes visual the subject it describes:

Then the tall shade, in drooping linens veil'd
Spake out, so much more earnest, that her breath
Stirr'd the thin folds of gauze that drooping hung
About a golden censer from her hand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pendent; and by her voice I knew she shed
Long-treasur'd tears.

But here, and generally in *The Fall of Hyperion,* it is possible to detect another, remoter accent. At the same time that Keats was rejecting Milton, he was absorbing Dante. In the same letter to George and Georgiana from which I have already quoted, he tells that he has been reading Italian—Ariosto and Dante— but defiantly asserts that he will "never become attach'd to a foreign idiom so as to put it into (his) writings". Bridges, in the essay already referred to, makes a good deal of this point:

> And besides this conscious correction of old faults, it is now for the first time that the influence of Dante appears, and that not merely in the gravity of the vision in this poem, which is unlike any other of his embodiments, and in the sort of connection conceived between his vision of doom and his own experience and poetic meaning, all of which he might have come at through at translation, but in echoes of the Italian balance in passages where the sense is like Dante's, as in this—
>
> High prophetess, said I, purge off,
> Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.
>
> And also where there is only the indefinable and individual touch to point to, as in—
>
> When in mid-day the sickening east wind
> Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
> Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,
>
> where the last line shows that Keats has now added to his style a mastery of Dante's especial grace: and such passages as this, or again as when he calls written words
>
> The shadows of melodious utterance,
>
> which is also Dantesque in thought, should, I think, have forbidden the later critics, who knew from external evidence when the *Revision* was written, from judging that the new style came from decay of poetic power.

It will be seen that Bridges regards this "attachment to a foreign idiom" with favour—it is an acquired mastery of a special grace, Dante's grace, and Keats is honoured by the theft. We must not carry the demand for integrity too far; and we might admit that a personal style can absorb "especial graces" and still remain predominantly personal. A question of affinity is involved. I do not think there was much affinity between the minds of Milton and Keats. Milton was ridden by his daemon: his utterance is positive and portentous. Keats had "no identity"; was "continually in for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(?informing) and filling some other Body". To be identified with Milton was to be identified with a foreign body ("life to him would be death to me"); to be identified with Dante was to be identified with a sympathetic and familiar body. We do not, properly speaking, *imitate* identities: we fall into step with our fellow spirits. Bridges finds the "indefinable and individual touch" of the lines about the "small warm rain" that "melts out the frozen incense from all flowers" Dantesque. For my part, I find them very English and Keatsian. I am reminded of that most English of all lyrical utterances:

> Western wind, when will thou blow,
> The small rain down can rain?

And of "The Unquiet Grave":

> The wind doth blow to-day, my love,
> And a few small drops of rain.

The *thought* of calling written words "the shadows of melodious utterance" may be Dantesque, but the expression, if not Keatsian, is Spenserian or Shakespearean.

This distinction, between the imitation of turns of thought, or conceits, and the imitation of verbal expression, is perhaps unduly subtle. I do not know what a critic like Leone Vivante[4] would make of it, for to him there would be no distinction between originality of thought and originality of expression: to be original in diction, the thought itself would have to be original, or at least, authentically re-thought. But most of us, I think, would admit a variety of authentic expressions of the same thought. The ambiguity lies in the expression "turn of thought"; for "thought" acquires a subtle inflection from the manner in which it is expressed, and Bridges is implying that Keats imitated Dante's inflections rather than the main substance of his thought. I am not very convinced myself, but the problem should be discussed with wider reference to such Dantesque poems as Shelley's "Triumph of Time" and the second movement of Eliot's "Little Gidding".

Before leaving *The Fall of Hyperion* I would like to point to two or three passages which seem to me to stand out with startling originality. We should bear in mind that we are quoting from a poem contemporary with the "Ode to Melancholy" and "To

[4]See his *Notes on the Originality of Thought* (1939) and his *English Poetry and its Contribution to the Knowledge of a Creative Principle* (1950).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Autumn" (poems which have a wealth of traditional beauty), and then compare such phrases as I italicize in these lines:

> . . . the scenes
> Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
> *With an electral changing misery. . . .*

or:

> Still fix'd he sat beneath the sable trees,
> Whose arms spread straggling in wild serpent forms,
> With leaves all hushed: his awful presence there
> (Now all was silent) gave a deadly lie
> To what I erewhile heard: *only his lips*
> *Trembled amid the white curls of his beard.*

or:

> . . . so also shudders he:
> *Not at dog's howl, or gloom-bird's Even screech,*
> Or the familiar visitings of one
> Upon the first toll of his passing bell;
> But *horrors, portion'd to a giant nerve*
> Make great Hyperion ache.

These, and many other separate lines and passages, are neither Miltonic nor Dantesque, neither Spenserian nor Shakespearean; they are the authentic voice of Keats's own feeling. Why, then, was the poem given up? Bridges would have it that there was a fundamental defect of organization—"the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest . . . the poem (he is speaking of the first version) fails in conduct." "Whatever mental qualities go to make a born artist, none is more essential than an unconscious enthrallment to his creative conception. When any true and sane artist has strayed into a fault that falsifies his conception, then his inspiration comes to a stand." The explanation is ingenious, but I doubt if it is the real one. We must remember Keats's tragic circumstances at the time: his hopeless, consuming passion for Fanny Brawne, the shadow of death that deepened every day. Poetry was a "feverous relief" from such worries; "abstractions" were "his only life" (expressions from his letter to Reynolds of September 21 or 22, 1818). "There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality." These phrases were written during the composition of the first *Hyperion,* but they continue in the same strain, and with increased cause, during the period of the composition of *The Fall of*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hyperion. Middleton Murry, in an Appendix to his *Keats and Shakespeare,*[5] has shown very convincingly that Keats's failure to complete the poem was a physical failure—a constitutional inability which Keats himself called "idleness", but which we might call despair. In spite of the factual details, Mr. Murry must nevertheless, in the main text of his book, give us a reason which is somewhat mystical:

> Keats abandoned the revised *Hyperion* because he was committing the sin of uttering soul-knowledge through an effort of mind-knowledge. That is a sin absent from the Decalogue, and unknown to ordinary experience; it is known only to poetic genius: it consists in the effort to utter what can only be revealed. It is in some sort a betrayal of the soul's knowledge, it is also a betrayal of the soul itself.

But in the same paragraph Mr. Murry admits that "at the moment that (Keats) was trying to shut out of his heart and mind Fanny and the world of men and women he was trying also to utter his knowledge that all things must be accepted. He was trying to deny and accept at once". And in a footnote Mr. Murry tries to illuminate this tangle:

> It is impossible to interrupt the narrative (and run the risk of mystifying the reader) by insisting once more upon what I believe to be true—namely, that the second *Hyperion* could not have been completed as that poem. It must necessarily have changed into something quite different. The visions and actions of the deified Apollo could have been none other than the visions and actions of the future Keats—that is to say, his unwritten poems and plays. This may be called a transcendental criticism: the name is unimportant, provided the criticism is a true one.

The criticism I have been indulging in is not transcendental: it is merely technical. All I am concerned to establish, with reference to the second version of *Hyperion,* is that it represents an advance in Keats's poetic diction, and that it was not abandoned for technical reasons. The reasons given by Bridges are conceptual: Keats had bitten off more than he could chew, to express it vulgarly. That, I think, Mr. Murry would most vehemently deny; and if Bridges means that Keats did not have a technique adequate to his conception, I too would deny such a charge. What Mr. Murry is saying, transcendental criticism apart, is that Keats

[5]Oxford, 1925.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had got himself into a mood in which he could not continue that particular poem. He quotes "the terrible lines" that reveal this mood:

> Oftentimes I pray'd
> Intense, that Death would take me from the vale
> And all its burthens—Gasping with despair
> Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself.

"The mood betrays the vision." Perhaps, but the mood was induced, not by metaphysical speculation, nor by a sense of creative inadequacy, but by the pressure of outward circumstances. Let us state the matter plainly: an unfrustrated, physically capable Keats would have carried *The Fall of Hyperion* to a triumphant conclusion.

Though we must, with Middleton Murry, regard *The Fall of Hyperion* as "the profoundest and most sublime" of Keats's poems, the fact remains, and remains to be considered, that at the moment he abandoned this poem, he wrote another poem which is generally regarded as his masterpiece: the "Ode to Autumn". Mr. Murry calls this poem Shakespearean—"Shakespearean in its rich and opulent serenity of mood, Shakespearean in its lovely and large periodic movement, like the drawing of a deep full breath . . . this is natural and spontaneous poetic power." I have no desire to challenge this judgment, though I think there is more of Chatterton than of Shakespeare in the poem—the Chatterton of "the purple plum'd maccaws" and of "the fragrant scented thorn" that "trembles with the gummy dew", as well as the Chatterton of those "limpid and lovely" lines which Mr. Murry does admit into comparison:

> When Autumn blake and sun-brente do appear
> With his gold hand gilding the falling leaf
> Bringing up winter to fulfil the year
> Bearing upon his back the ripéd sheaf;
> When all the hills with woody seed is white;
> When levin-fires and lemes do meet from far the sight;
>
> When the fair apple, ruddy as even sky,
> Do bend the tree unto the fructile ground:
> When juicy pears and berries of black dye
> Do dance in air, and call the eyne around;
> Then, be the even foul, or even fair,
> Methinks my heartes joy is steyncéd with some care.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is even in the "Ode" something of the Milton of "Lycidas", though nothing of the Milton of *Paradise Lost*. If it does represent a return to Shakespeare, it is not to the Shakespeare of *Lear* and *The Tempest,* though possibly to the Shakespeare of *Antony and Cleopatra*—"colour'd with magnificence".[6] *The Eve of St. Agnes,* which also belongs to this Shakespearean "return", returns to the still earlier Shakespeare of *Venus and Adonis.* But in *The Fall of Hyperion* Keats had advanced beyond these models, and this being granted, the Odes and *The Eve of St. Agnes* are to be regarded, not so much as a return, but as a reaction—as a failure of nerve, as "false beauty proceeding from art" and not as "the true voice of feeling". To place the "Ode to Melancholy" in a poetic category somewhat lower than *The Fall of Hyperion* is to go against the general consensus of opinion. What is different in kind is not necessarily different in degree. But looking to the future, from the standpoint of Keats's last technical efforts, the "Ode" has a weedy if luscious progeny; whereas *The Fall of Hyperion,* in the organic vitality of its structure, points forward to "The Windhover" and *The Waste Land.*

[6]The phrase Keats used of this play in a letter to Haydon (10 April, 1818).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MALCOLM M. ROSS

A Note on the Metaphysicals

PUTTING ASIDE ALTOGETHER THE QUESTION of definition and assuming for the moment a general awareness of the *thing*, I propose here to search out a kind of motion in the poetic firmament of the earlier 17th century. Definition is both static and abstract. It arrests and defleshes and, consequently, destroys the very phenomenon it seeks to reveal. And I suspect that our various definitions of the metaphysical mode, our conceptualizations of it as apart from our awareness of it, differ finally in accordance with the point at which we decide to arrest its motion. We all admit that Herbert is really quite unlike Donne and that Cleveland is unlike either of them. But when we come to define the metaphysical style we tend either to abstract the denominator common to all of them or to erect a generalization out of the peculiar qualities of one of them. If we like Donne, we define the metaphysical in terms of his three best poems or his four best images. If we do not like Donne, we define the metaphysical style in terms of Cleveland's worst excesses.

I wonder if in making a cult of our concern for the single poetic unit—for the poem as little world unto itself—we have not lost sight of vitalities which surge between poem and poem, vitalities which may indeed sustain and even determine the life of the poetic unit? If it be true that "pressures" and "tensions" mark and make the aesthetic existence of the self-enclosed world of the single poem, is it not possible that analogous "pressures" and "tensions" place this world within a larger firmament and propel it along its proper orbit? And if this be so, should aesthetic criticism lower its gaze exclusively to the static sublunary dimensions of the poem as a poem as a poem?

In writing this footnote on the decline of the metaphysical style, my strategy is to go outside the particular poetic unit—and even the particular poetic style—in order to detect at least some of the laws of motion to which the poetry of the period necessarily responds under the centrifugal compulsions of the firmament in which it is conceived. It is my hope that a glimpse, however brief, of significant motion in the heavens of 17th century poetry, will deepen our awareness of what goes by the name "metaphysical", even if it makes the game of definition harder than ever to play.

Between the serious multi-dimensional imagery of Donne at his best and the "far-fetched" contrivances of Cleveland's wit, one readily discerns a motion—a kind of cultural regress. This regress must not, however, be put down to the effect of broad and simple changes in the general culture of the period.

In the 17th century the transition from a dominantly Christian to a domi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nantly secular world-view seems to happen with startling abruptness. The years from Donne to Dryden—the years of the Fletchers, Herbert, Milton, Crashaw—could these be indeed the last years of the Christendom of the arts? The tempo of the change, this almost simultaneous flowering and withering of the Christian poetic sensibility, is the most striking phenomenon of the English 17th century. And while it is only a phase of what, by hindsight, appears to have been a broad and leisurely pattern of change from a religious to a secular world-view, the intensity and the self-consciousness of the movement in poetry cannot be perceived by way of any abstractive description.

The movement in poetry can best be glimpsed through those Christian symbols which at one and the same time are rooted in dogma and which convey—or seek to convey—the immediate sense of existence. In other words, I shall be mainly concerned here with such symbols as are intended to interpenetrate two orders of being, the divine and the natural.

It should be recalled that the period of the rise and decline of the metaphysical mode is the period in which the radical 16th century revisions of dogma are digested, in whole or in part, by English Christian poetry. It is, of course, in Anglican poetry, hovering precariously as it must between Catholic and Protestant symbol, that one is able to see most clearly a far-reaching crisis in the Christian aesthetic. And one is soon aware of an agitated motion within the Anglican firmament of symbol, a motion which when seen does much to explain not only this sudden and varied flowering of Christian poetry but also its equally sudden withering.

The 17th century Anglican inherits most of the enthusiasm, some of the individualism and much of the dogmatism of the Reform. Yet he clings lovingly to the rhetoric of the ancient worship even when that rhetoric has been dissociated from traditional dogma. Not only, then, do the rhetorical and dogmatic levels of Anglican symbol sometimes contradict each other—the referential power of language itself is brought to a state of uncertainty and suspense. For if it is possible to attribute something of the energy and intensity of 17th century Christian poetry to the zeal of the reform fused with a subtle, rich and deepened sense of the interior religious life, it is only just also to observe that this energy, intensity and inwardness is often now made to seek expression in symbols which have been, quite literally, disfigured. For certainly, poets susceptible in any degree to the influence of the great liturgical reformers, Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, were placed in a curious predicament. Ultimately, the choice for them had to be between a thorough-going rejection of traditional liturgical symbol and a scrupulously selective use of bits and pieces of traditional symbolism disinfected of all Catholic taint. Not only is the functional suggestiveness of Christian symbol thus rendered uncertain for everyone who writes it, but also the sure line of communication begins to waver and "public

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

truth" threatens to become little more than a collection of private truths, each couched in a pseudo-public language. Little wonder that in such a confused semantic situation Laud went to the scaffold for Catholicism while Herbert's verse captivated even the most extreme Puritan.

To put it as briefly as possible—after Cranmer's revision of the Anglican liturgy, the original sacramental efficacy of the Eucharist is at least in doubt, and the central liturgical symbol is either reduced to mere metaphor or placed under unbearable strain. The consequences for poetry are enormous.

I am aware that it has recently become fashionable to stretch the word "metaphor" into a synonym for the whole sweep of the creative process. Here it will be used to mean an implied comparison between things essentially unlike in the interests of expansion and illustration. The "conceit" is thus a metaphorical device of sorts. The term "analogy" is used here to describe what might be called a sacramental belief in existence—in the act of existence, in the *relevance* of existence. As I use the term here, analogy is a direct intuition of being whereby things are seen to possess their own intrinsic actuality and yet to participate in larger communities of reference and in relationships which are moral and spiritual without ceasing to be actual and specific. The analogical Christian symbol is not a shadow illustration of an idea—never simple metaphor. It is rather the *instance* of higher levels of being in which it participates. But metaphor, as I use the term here, implies *no more than* a comparison between the levels of being and excludes any genuine participation of the one in the other.

The analogical symbol of Christian poetry was nourished, if not bred, by ancient Eucharistic dogma with its insistence on the relevance of the physical order, with its assumption of the simultaneous and single Presence at the altar of the Heavenly, the Historical and the Mystical Christ. In the liturgy the eternal sacrificial act was understood to apply to man within time. And the redemptive process did not scorn to make use of these simple things of nature which man had fashioned into bread and wine. The symbolism of the Eucharist confirmed the sacramental knowledge of things, assuring to things a proper analogical dignity and worth.

It is precisely this analogical valuation of things which falters in the early 17th century. If one were forced to define, one might even say that the "metaphysical" style of Donne is a tortured embrace of true analogy by mere metaphor. I would not, of course, contend that the pulling apart of man from things, the separation of the natural from the spiritual order is brought about solely or mainly by the revision of the liturgy. We are familiar enough now with the intellectual compulsions of the outer firmament of value in the 17th century. I am, of course, attempting nothing more than a footnote to what has been written about the larger phenomenon. I shall narrow myself here to a consideration of the specifically Christian symbol. But I do not claim that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what happens within the Christian firmament of symbol is the root cause of everything that happens outside and beyond it. It is obvious that in Donne the metaphysical mode reaches its fulfilment in a poetry which is overtly secular. However, the persistent occurence in Donne's most frankly secular work of the liturgical and ecclesiastical image hints, at least, at the presence and pressure even here of deeply engrained habits of thought and feeling which are mediaeval and Catholic in origin.

My point is that even without the pressures exerted on traditional culture patterns by scientific, philosophic and political revolution, energies within Christian thought as such were sufficient to transform the nature of crucial symbol and to question the referential validity of the word.

The plight of language within the specifically Christian firmament of the 17th century appears in two phases. In general, the poetry of what we would now call "the Low Church party" displays an uninterrupted decline of the analogical symbol into simple metaphor. In the poetry of more Catholic-minded Anglicans a counter-movement occurs and the rhetorical and dogmatic levels of symbol strain towards each other, touch, but never finally fuse.

It is with the poetry of this second and Catholic phase that I am concerned. In the first, or Low Church phase, the drift is toward verbal abstraction, and the unfleshing of the symbol. It is fair to say that in this poetry (which is represented adequately in Farr's anthologies of Elizabethan and Jacobean devotional verse), the emphasis is almost entirely on an inner religious feeling for which there can be no proper sacramental expression. Images of altar, incense, the wounds of Christ still occur but only as arbitrary and exterior counters for purely psychological states. Presumably the process of incarnation is to be reversed and the word is now to be unfleshed. Traditional typological symbols like "the bread of life", "the spring" and "the tree" are reduced to the level of stock phrase and cliché. The Blood of the Lamb is on the way to becoming a bloodless verbal commonplace. Spring without water, tree without leaf—a parade of semantic ghosts, the abstract verbal husks of concrete image, mere signs detached from things and made to shadow forth the idea and the bodiless spiritual insight.

The counter-movement within the Anglican firmament illustrates the poignant dilemma of the metaphysical mode as it leans towards its decline. The solid surfaces of Catholic rhetoric return. The Virgin Mother resumes the niche which had been usurped for a while by the Virgin Queen. This restoration to poetry of Mary, the saints, traditional typology and all the rest of it would seem to be part of a strenuous effort, by way of analogical symbol, to bring the natural order once more within range of the divine.

A poet like Joseph Beaumont works through images at once traditional and concrete. Here, as in Herbert, is the langauge of the sacramental possession of things—the language of analogy. And yet such langauge is employed by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beaumont, as by Herbert, to its own destruction. The rhetorical surfaces of this poetry are often fully Catholic, and in individual poems the analogical capacity of symbols sometimes seems to survive. But it would not do for us to rest altogether in the item, in the poetic unit. One must be aware of what amounts to a kind of motion between poem and poem, even between image and image, a motion which frets to decay the texture of the tradition in which Beaumont and Herbert seek to work.

For instance, these saints of Beaumont's are never invoked. Mary is hailed as full of grace but she is certainly not asked to pray for us. Nowhere in this Catholic-Anglican poetry is there any sense of a living exchange between the Church militant and the Church triumphant. These are plaster saints indeed! The analogical possibility of the saint-image is half suggested in the devotional act and is then foreshortened. The dogmatic ground of analogy thus falls away. Great words feeding on the bread but not, really, on the Body shrink suddenly like Alice-in-Wonderland and are in danger of disappearing. The decorative surfaces of ancient piety discharge a fleeting energy of suggestiveness into the Anglican firmament of symbol. But the habit of analogical thinking is only half-awakened.

The heart of the matter is the revolution in Eucharistic dogma. This decline in analogical activity which I have noted is the peripheral consequence of a collapse at the dogmatic centre of the firmament of symbol.

Herbert's Eucharistic theology will stand for this whole group of Catholic-looking Anglican poets. In poems like *The Invitation* and *The Banquet* Herbert seems close to that "carnal" view of the Eucharist so repellant to Anglicanism then as now. But his careful doctrinal poem *The Holy Communion* is meant as a precise statement of Eucharistic doctrine. It forces us, in a disturbing but compulsory motion back and forth between poetic wholes and single images, to look below the Catholic surfaces of these other poems and to revise our readings of them. For in *The Holy Communion,* bread and wine, spreading through the physical body of the communicant, carry only the "name" of Christ and in themselves may not leap "the wall that parts our souls and fleshly hearts":

But by the way of nourishment and strength
Thou creep'st into my breast;
Making thy way my rest
And thy small quantity my length;
Which spread their forces into every part,
Meeting sinnes force and art.

Yet can these not get over to my soul,
Leaping the wall that parts
Our souls and fleshly hearts;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But as th' outworks, they may controll
My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,
Affright both sinne and shame.

Onely thy grace, which with these elements comes,
Knoweth the ready way
And hath the privie key
Op'ning the soul's most subtile rooms;
While those to spirits refin'd, at doore attend
Dispatches from their friend.

Not only, then, is the world of flesh cut off sharply from the world of spirit, but also the physical elements of the Eucharist are specifically separated from the spiritual reality of Christ's Presence. Indeed, Christ is said to be present only in the *grace* "with which these elements come". The physical act of communion is accompanied by a separate activity in the soul—on the other side of the high wall. In the light of this, one recognizes that the traditional imagery of Bread and Blood in a poem like *The Banquet* should be read as sign and not as symbol. "Bread" and "blood" are here the exterior counters of a religious experience wholly subjective in kind. The sense of the analogical *participation* of the exterior in the interior, of the natural order in the divine, disappears. The texture of Eucharistic symbol in Herbert and the Catholic-looking Anglicans is often quite traditional. But it is not at all what it seems to be.

Professor Murdock in his *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England* makes a penetrating comment on the apparent sensuousness of Anglican poetry. He finds that sense images abound but that, generally, "beauty of words and images only typify or represent the idea of what is holy." No matter what the image from the physical or natural order "the emphasis was put on a doctrine, or a truth, a moral dogma or holy emotion, not on the natural object itelf." In brief, one observes in Herbert and the Catholic Anglicans the spectacle of analogical language dissolving into simple metaphor.

S. L. Bethell, in his valuable book *The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, argues that in Shakespeare, for whom the hierarchical structures of the mediaeval world-view still held, multiple planes of reality rise and cohere along each link of the chain of being. In Shakespeare, therefore, images from the natural order may function simultaneously at the moral, the social and the spiritual levels of experience. But for John Donne "the great chain of being was rather badly damaged." In Donne's poetry the analogical sense has shrunk to a feeling "for the spiritual element being implicit in" or "somewhere just behind" the concrete situation. While Donne can never, therefore, achieve "the shifting functional metaphor of Shakespeare" (i.e. the fully analogical symbol) "his imagery is nevertheless capable of striking a genuine metaphysical relationship between two terms: a relationship in the realm of being".

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But as Bethell justly observes, this analogical activity is often compromised in Donne by the mere play of wit. There is imbalance, instability in the style. In a phrase like this—"One might almost say her body thought"—the "interpenetration of mind and matter is a reality". The analogical grip holds. But quite as characteristic of Donne is the witty but clearly univocal metaphor of the compass in *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*. It is as if Donne strained simultaneously towards Shakespeare and towards Cleveland. This much Bethell and others have noted. But it is significant, too, I think, that the tension between true analogy and mere metaphor is equally apparent in Donne's religious writing. He can state in one breath his fully Eucharistic belief in the corporateness of man—and in another flatly reject the corporate doctrine of redemption in and through the living communion of saints. "Other men's crosses are not my crosses"—the saints have nothing to do for Donne. And so is he not, after all, an island entire of himself? The corporate body of men in history is, finally, cut off from analogical participation in the mystical and *metahistorical* Body of Christ.

If in Donne true analogy and mere metaphor co-exist in an uneasy, although fruitful, state of tension, in Herbert the relation is simpler—and less fruitful. Metaphor succeeds analogy with the immediacy of a first echo—and with the poignant loveliness of something very near yet very far because irretrievable.

This process of dissolution goes even further in the lesser Anglican poets, arriving even at something like conscious parody of the analogical way of perception. In Thomas Washbourne's poem on the circulation of the blood all the elements of the analogical grip on reality seem, at first glance, to be present and active. The circulation of the blood is first compared to the circular motion of English politics:

> *We know a kingdome which of late*
> *Converted was into a state*
> *And from the hands of many men*
> *That State devolved to one again.*

Then the progress of man from dust to dust, the wheeling of the seasons, the descent and ascent of the soul—the historical, the natural and the spiritual orders—seem to move in a single rhythm. And yet, as Washbourne actually places it, there is no sense at all of the analogy of being in the relation between the circular motion of societies, seasons and persons. These vain circlings in the world of appearance are alike only in their inability to arrive anywhere; they are equally and simultaneously meaningless and in shadow. Only above the circlings, in a realm of being which has no possible analogical relation to the world of flux, does the soul find peace—and proper symbol. What might have been an effort to illuminate the lively *participation* of the microcosm in the macrocosm becomes nothing more than a witty reduction of analogy to metaphor—the drastic dissociation of microcosm from macrocosm.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It has been my aim here to suggest that in addition to all the forces proceeding from the new thought to the destruction of traditional cultural patterns, the reform of Christian dogma itself has been to the detriment of analogical activity in poetry. The centre of the Christian firmament of symbol did not hold. No wonder that the firmament fell into fragments and that the several orders of being now seemed alien one to the other. Even the revival, in Vaughan, of a neo-Platonic and Cabbalistic doctrine of correspondences is no more, can be no more, than a shadowy and precarious substitute for an analogical awareness grounded anciently in dogma. And the shadow soon passes.

Perhaps the metaphysical mode is a clutching after straws as the ancient bricks crumble. And when one sees the phenomenon is motion one remembers that it never really was at rest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIVIAN MERCIER

Perfection of the Life, or of the Work?

FROM THE DOZENS OF BOOKS BY AND ABOUT GIDE that have been published or reprinted in the U. S. since his winning of the Nobel Prize in 1947, and especially since his death in 1951, I have chosen half a dozen[1] for review here as representative of most of the trends. At this late date there were few "masterpieces" left to translate; although both *Oedipus* and *Theseus* may belong in that elastic category, *My Theater* is more typical of the kind of creative work—minor, early, or both—which is now finding its way into English. Then there are recent autobiographical works which could not well have appeared in English any sooner—the last volume of the *Journals*, only finished in 1949, and the posthumous *Madeleine*. Finally, to represent the biographers and critics who will be drinking at the wake for at least the next decade, we have Professors March and Guerard. I had better deal with them first, because their books probably give us a fair idea of the shape Gide's American reputation is going to take in the near future. In the familiar battle of "The Man" versus "The Artist", the man has piled up a long lead on points and even appears to be hoping for a knockout.

So, at least, March's book would indicate. In his foreword he quotes the following sentence from Gide as his *point d'appui*: "We each of us have a reason for living, superior, secret—secret even for ourselves—and assuredly quite different from the external objective which most of us assign to our lives." He then continues as follows:

> The purpose of this book is to attempt to discover this secret reason for Gide's life and work. It is not concerned with autonomous art, the closed domain of literature, and it does not pretend to complete coverage of his writings, although by far the greater part of them have a bearing on our problem. Nor does the book try to give a full account of Gide's life, but only of such parts of it as illuminate the inner drama.

Elsewhere he describes his book as "a study of Gide as self-revealed"; all through, he treats the works as a set of clues to the man.

---

[1]GIDE AND THE HOUND OF HEAVEN, by *Harold March*. University of Pennsylvania. $5.00. ANDRE GIDE, by *Albert J. Guerard*. Harvard. $4.00. THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE, Volume IV:1939-1949. Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by *Justin O'Brien*. Knopf. $6.00. MADELEINE (ET NUNC MANET IN TE), by *André Gide*. Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by *Justin O'Brien*. Knopf. $3.00. MY THEATER: Five Plays and an Essay, by *André Gide*. Translated by *Jackson Mathews*. Knopf. $4.00. TWO LEGENDS: OEDIPUS and THESEUS, by *André Gide*. Translated by *John Russell*. Knopf. $3.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gide being the kind of writer he was, no approach is more tempting—or more dangerous—than March's. It is customary to say of Gide that his creative works are all autobiographical; it would be as true or truer to say that all his autobiographies are creative works. Even from his journal he tore out and destroyed unsatisfactory pages as he went along. "Et nunc manet in te", the essential part of *Madeleine,* reminds me irresistibly of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* or his recently recovered *Cécile;* all three are brief, tidy, classically restrained statements of incredibly untidy emotional messes.

Gide and the Hound of Heaven, while it never succeeds in tracking down the "secret reason", does assemble a large and well-chosen selection of quotations that undoubtedly throws light on the "inner drama"—so much light, indeed, that the dazzled reader may well find it harder than ever to see Gide in firm outline. My chief criticism of the book, however, is that in his interpretations of Gide's writings March does not play his self-appointed role of psychoanalyst or sleuth with sufficient gusto; one interpretation per work, and often a fairly superficial one at that, appears to satisfy him; multiple interpretations, or those showing any great degree of subtlety, he shies away from.

The first sentence of his final chapter reads as follows:

> One can make a start toward an interpretation of Gide's career with common sense and a dash of psychology.

If *the* secret reason of Gide's life is ever found—and I beg leave to doubt that it will be—the finder will surely make use of more precise instruments than these. He will have to be both a trained psychoanalyst, which March is not, and a more penetrating literary critic than March, despite his useful *The Two Worlds of Marcel Proust,* is likely ever to become.

Guerard, on the other hand, while not always resisting the temptation to amateur psychoanalysis which Gide offers all of us, does reveal a very sensitive critical equipment whenever he chooses to make use of it. At worst, he seeks in the life for clues to the work—and to the work's influence, which he sometimes finds disproportionate to its intrinsic merit. A very perceptive study of Gide the novelist—obviously the book Guerard set out to write—has gotten itself wrapped in some rather irrelevant trimmings, unhappily. His first chapter, "The Crisis of Individualism", is little more than a summary of Gide's biography; his second, "The Spiritual Autobiographies", brings him too close to March's position for comfort; the next two, which I'll return to in a minute, deal with the novels and are the meat of the book; the fifth and last, "The Corruptor of Youth", written at Gide's own suggestion, tries to explain the disproportionate influence which his work has had in France, but Guerard must inevitably gather his evidence at second hand, thus forfeiting the immediacy which only a young French writer who had grown up under that influence could supply.

If he had not tried to write something that would justify the all-promising title of *André Gide—tout court*—Guerard had it in his power to write the book

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that American readers of Gide in translation need most. His approach to the novels makes this certain. As he says,

> The novels have been dissected endlessly for their ideas and attitudes. But only a very few critics . . . have examined structure and strategy in detail.

Himself a novelist, Guerard succeeds in confining his scrutiny to matters of technique for pages at a time; as a result, he frequently surprises us by suggesting that some of Gide's most disturbing effects are gained by the use of innocent technical devices rather than the exploitation of tabooed subject matter. We can only regret that he did not analyze all the works, and not merely the novels, from this standpoint.

True, certain pages of his chapter on the spiritual autobiographies do "examine structure and strategy in detail." I am not speaking now of his fascinating analysis of the unfamiliar *Voyage d'Urien,* which after all is not very far from being a novel, but rather of some remarks on *Si le grain ne meurt* which treat it less as a confession than as a work of art. If he had done the same thing throughout the chapter, he would have blown sky-high the positions of March and all the others who forget that autobiography too is an art form.

As a sample of Guerard's handling of the novels, let us look at his unorthodox treatment of *The Counterfeiters:*

> . . . the most important structural fact about *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* is its failure to preserve the point of view of the opening chapters. Edouard's task was to achieve a higher reality through the stylization of art. But Gide's task was to write a free, spontaneous, anti-realistic novel unclogged by subjectivity. Bringing in Edouard invited the complications and ingenuities; but also it permitted him to revert to an older manner. Put otherwise, the originality and lasting freshness of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* does not lie in its novel within a novel, or even in its elaborate over-all structure.

Where, then, does it (or do they) lie? Chiefly in Gide's use of the "roving conductor" in his early chapters:

> The roving conductor is a camera with a personality and a man reading stage directions aloud: conducting, observing and listening to a life that unrolls in an eternal present. He is telling the story, as the events occur before him, not writing a book. Until late in the novel—and it would be hard to overemphasize the importance of this—he speaks in the present tense . . .

Analysis like this may well entitle Guerard to laugh a little at "the literary critic, who has so emphasized Edouard's diary and novel (the novel Gide didn't write and Edouard couldn't) as to all but forget Bernard and Olivier." As he remarks further on:

> Most of this "technical" criticism has been irrelevant. It has depended too much on Gide's theoretic pages and too little on the total impres-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> sion his novel makes. The obvious fact is that Edouard's reasonings continue to seem important and central only to the person writing an essay on Gide.

After such a revolutionary onslaught on much pretentious academic nonsense, one is not at all surprised to find Guerard climbing far out on a limb with his assertion that *The Immoralist*, not *The Counterfeiters*, is Gide's greatest (perhaps his one great) novel. It is a privilege to huddle on that limb alongside him.

If Gide the man is given precedence over Gide the artist by many writers besides March, and if Gide's intention to make *The Counterfeiters* his masterpiece in the novel is given precedence over his actual achievement in that book by critics who lack Guerard's percipience, nobody is more to blame than Gide himself. I have already stated that he prompted Guerard's unsatisfactory last chapter; the "Two Letters from André Gide" which Guerard prints as an appendix document this fact and also reveal that Gide was very much surprised by Guerard's estimate of *The Immoralist*.

When he submitted his typescript to Gide, Guerard certainly asked for the kind of prompting he received, but I think it is fair to say that Gide was always a little too ready to collaborate with his critics. Among many other purposes, the publication of the *Journals* during his lifetime served that of setting forth his view of his own work. The more conscientious the critic, the more likely he is to read the *Journals* with scrupulous attention and to allow himself to be influenced by them. Two examples from the fourth and last volume of the Knopf edition will show the directions in which Gide tried to influence his critics—or tended to influence them without even trying. First, he is still fighting a rearguard action in defense of the literary merit of the somewhat ridiculous *Corydon* (see especially pp. 272-3). Second, his record of the "state of joyful ardor" (p. 240) in which he wrote *Theseus* has doubtless reassured many critics who had felt that this last "masterpiece" was spread just a leetle thin.

One finds, too, a tendency on Gide's part to make a symbol of himself that was never fully self-conscious in the earlier volumes. Look at this passage, for instance (p. 256):

> That turn of mind (that vicious turn of mind) that people used to blame in me was what saved France. An attitude of insubordination, of revolt; or even initially and simply an attitude of inquiry. . . . So that, as if by chance my former accusers suddenly and all together turned up on the wrong side: Béraud, Massis, Mauclair, Maurice Martin du Gard . . . without a single exception so far as I know—and it could not have been otherwise.

Though not, of course, claiming here to have personally saved France, he does, as elsewhere, claim to symbolize what is best and most enduring in the French spirit. In *Theseus*, the hero's frequent first-person references to founding Athens ("My city stands") may allude also to Gide's own achievements. Over and over again in the *Journals* Gide insists that he is first and foremost a literary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

artist, but those who disbelieve him are to be pardoned, since so many of his books, from *Corydon* through *Si le grain ne meurt* and *Voyage au Congo* to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, had almost the force of deeds. One might even suspect that Oscar Wilde, who said of himself to Gide (with so much truth) that he had put his genius into his life, only his talent into his works, aroused in the latter a spirit of emulation that he could never completely exorcise. Gide's public life between the two wars could hardly have won him more notoriety if it had been deliberately planned with that in view. From open avowal of homosexuality, to anti-imperialism, to Communism, and finally to rejection of Communism, the life seems to follow a cunningly contrived pattern of mounting climaxes, followed by a reassuring anti-climax, that cannot fail to remind us of the work of art. Yeats has told us that:

> *The intellect of man is forced to choose*
> *Perfection of the life or of the work . . .*

but Gide evaded this dilemma as he did all others, by refusing to make an irrevocable choice—or by choosing first one horn and then the other.

I have touched on just two aspects of the last volume of the *Journals*, as the only ones relevant to my present purpose, though they usurp a very small fraction of its rich and varied pages. Fortunately, Professor Justin O'Brien's Introduction to the volume provides, as usual, a perfect brief prospectus of it. His editing of the four volumes deserves fourfold thanks—for his Introductions, for his unintrusive Notes, and above all for the Indexes and the Glossaries of Persons which make the *Journals* such a valuable work of reference for those interested in French life and literature since 1890.

Madeleine is divided into two parts: "Et nunc manet in te" and "Intimate Journal". The first is a memoir of Mme. Gide, while the second contains hitherto suppressed pages relating to her from the *Journals* (together with other similar pages which were not suppressed, but which Gide reprinted to give some continuity to his story).

Let me try to regard "Et nunc . . ." purely as a work of art and enquire, using Guerard's terminology, what its structure and strategy are. The strategy, I believe, can be fairly easily defined. "This work," says Gide in effect, "is a reverie. It does not attempt a systematic character portrait of Madeleine, let alone a biography of her. Nor is it—perish the thought—an apologia for my treatment of her."

The opening paragraph sets the requisite tone:

> Yesterday evening I was thinking of her; I was talking with her, as I often used to do, more easily in imagination than in her presence; when suddenly I said to myself: but she is dead. . . .

A few pages later he breaks off a character analysis, a seventeenth-century *portrait* of Madeleine, that he has hardly well begun, and makes a fresh start thus:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> No, this is not the way to speak of her appropriately or as I should like to do. Many recollections immediately rise up in opposition to the portrait I am trying to draw. It is better simply to remember.

Nearly halfway through the memoir comes the biggest break of all; this fresh start is dated "Luxor, 8 February '39", and begins characteristically, "I open this notebook again after having forsaken it for several months." These references throughout the works to the *carnet* which Gide is always either opening or closing give an impression of spontaneity and even of sincerity which became a fetish with him over the years. "How," he seems to ask the reader, "can something which I jot down from time to time in a little notebook, just as the spirit moves me, be adjudged a calculated work of art?"

So much for the strategy; the structure is far more difficult to define, because Gide has left it so flexible as to allow scope for a great deal of genuine spontaneity—and for some writing that is downright compulsive. An evocation of himself patting the bare arms of adolescents on his honeymoon is followed by the admission, "I needed to tell that . . ."

Near the beginning of "Et nunc . . ." Gide confesses that:

> . . . the whole effort of my love tended less to bridge the gap between us than to bridge the gap between her and that ideal figure I invented. At least this is the way it strikes me today; and I do not think Dante acted differently with Beatrice.

Therefore he is trying now to evoke Madeleine as she really was. This avowed aim gives the memoir whatever unity it possesses. He admits that the drama of her life was probably a more ordinary one than he used to imagine: she may have felt that her husband's inability to possess her was the fault of her own inferior attractions; above all, she must have missed children. He goes on to explain how, on medical advice, he married Madeleine, although fully aware of his homosexual leanings. The doctor told him, in effect, that marriage would cure all that.

When Gide found out how wrong the doctor was, he comforted himself with two illusions: the first, that Madeleine would never miss what he could not give her; the second, that she was unaware of his true sexual tastes. It seems probable that he managed to defend both illusions until a day in November, 1918, when, as the suppressed journal passages tell us, he learned that Madeleine had destroyed his entire lifelong correspondence with her after his departure to England with Marc Allégret in June of that year.

After this action, the most explicit sign that she ever gave of what she suffered from his neglect, she withdrew herself more and more from her husband and from the world. In her stubborn way, she tried to destroy her beauty and her intelligence—ruining her hands, giving up reading—till she looked so old that one day she was mistaken for Gide's mother.

At this precise point the whole curve of "Et nunc . . ." turns decisively upwards. Her instinctive loyalty makes her draw closer to Gide in her last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years, when he is under attack from both Catholics and Communists—perhaps even in danger of death from the latter, she believes. The concluding evocations of Madeleine in "Et nunc . . ." elevate her once again to the role of Beatrice—with Gide at her side deriving somehow from her presence a sort of sanctity which he is powerless to define:

> . . . it was having known her that made me so often feel like a stranger on this earth, playing the game of life without too much believing in it, for having known through her a less tangible but more genuine reality. My intelligence might well negate that secret reality; I felt it.

Whatever structure and avowed purpose "Et nunc . . ." has, then, seem at times only to constitute a device for belittling and disfiguring the "real" Madeleine, the flesh-and-blood woman whom Gide was never able to possess carnally, or indeed to win over to any of his beliefs. When she has been thus symbolically destroyed, the Beatrice-figure rises again in her place.

Yet somehow Madeleine preserves her identity when one re-reads "Et nunc . . ." In her rock-ribbed Protestantism, she remains even more stubbornly an individualist than Gide himself. "I believe it was from her," he writes, " that I drew the need for sincerity. . . ." As in all his best books, ambivalent feelings are kept in balance; their "dialogue", to employ a favorite term of Gide's, never results in a clear-cut victory for either side.

Drama, unluckily for Gide, requires clear-cut victories; only the very greatest dramatists, of whom he certainly isn't one, succeed in leaving their audience purged of passion, restored to equilibrium, confident that the death of Lear or the blinding of Oedipus is at once a defeat and a victory.

Saul and *King Candaules,* the two full-length plays of the five collected in *My Theater,* both reveal, in very different ways, Gide's shortcomings as a dramatist. *Saul,* one of his favorites among his works, bears the stamp of Gide's mind upon its very failure: virtually the whole play is taken up by the "dialogue" within Saul, which paralyzes him because he can find no resolution of it. In love with David, he is torn between the Witch of Endor's warning, "All that delights you is your enemy. . . . Free yourself!" and his own unanswered query, "Is there no remedy for my desire, other than to satisfy it?" Saul's death really settles nothing, yet of necessity it ends the play.

King Candaules, on the other hand, with its "invisible man" (Gyges), its two murders and a strip-tease on stage, contained everything needful for successful melodrama except success. Gide's worried preface shows that he feared a pornographic success if the play were exploited by a Philistine director. Candaules tries to impose his new ethic of sharing everything (including his wife) upon conventional people like Gyges and the Queen herself. Gyges, after possessing the Queen with the assistance of the ring that makes him invisible, murders Candaules at the instigation of the outraged lady. This time a clear-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cut victory has been won, by *l'homme moyen* over "advanced" ideas, but we feel no more satisfied than we did at the end of the inconclusive *Saul*. The conclusion of *King Candaules* seems altogether *too* pat.

My Theater also contains two short plays, *Bathsheba* and *Philoctetes*, which are published in France as part of a volume of ethical "treatises", and can hardly be classified as drama; *Philoctetes* comes closer to Platonic dialogue than to Sophoclean tragedy. The volume is rounded out by a libretto, *Persephone*, for a Stravinsky opera, dating from Gide's fellow-traveler period, and by a 1904 lecture, "The Evolution of the Theater", which is largely an attack on realism and on something just as deplorable, exemplified by Rostand, which Gide calls "episodism". Two sentences summarize his argument:

> The way to save the theater from episodism is to rediscover its restrictions. The way to people it again with characters is to separate it again from life.

To read the argument in full is to be impressed by how nearly his view of the theater approximates Yeats's of the same period.

Like Yeats, Gide sought in the theater an escape from subjectivity, as he sought it later in the novel. The right balance between subjectivity and objectivity eluded him in his early plays: *Saul* contains too much of himself, *King Candaules* not enough. It remained for *Oedipus* (1931), a whole generation later, to show how much of his own personaltiy he could project into a valid drama.

Nobody who has read *Si le grain ne meurt* and *Madeleine* can avoid the conclusion that Oedipus is a *persona* of Gide. That is as it should be. All his best work straddles the imaginary line that separates art and autobiography; the creative works and the autobiographies merely approach the line from opposite sides. He belongs to that large group of creative artists who are incapable of understanding an abstract idea until it has particularized itself in their own experience.

Take the idea of predestination, which bulks so large in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and has its share in Gide's *Oedipus* too. How did that idea, so familiar theoretically to one who was brought up a Calvinist, impinge upon Gide's own experience? Through his homosexuality, undoubtedly, for he maintains once more in *Madeleine* that his homosexuality was congenital, not acquired. His "nature" was his destiny—that nature which he so often refers to in terms similar to this outburst from *Si le grain ne meurt*:

> In the name of what God, of what ideal, do you forbid me to live according to my nature?

Free will versus predestination, hubristic self-assertion versus obedience to the will of the gods, are the themes of Gide's *Oedipus*, as of Sophocles'. After Oedipus' boast in his opening speech, "Happiness was not given to me; I conquered it", the Chorus come forward and introduce themselves in these words:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> We, the Chorus, whose particular function in this place is to represent the opinion of the majority, declare ourselves surprised and grieved by the profession of so aggressive an individualism.

The above quotation also gives the peculiar tone of the play—extremely self-conscious, always on the verge of comedy or even of parody. The chief justification for such a tricky approach is that it allows Gide to supply a commentary on Sophocles while at the same time he avoids odious comparisons between his own tragic powers and those of the Greek poet by taking all the big tragic scenes for granted. Naturally, this technique uses up Sophocles' material at a terrific rate, devouring a good deal of *Oedipus at Colonus* as well as *Oedipus the King* and still leaving room for original scenes by Gide in a fairly short play. The most amusing of these scenes shows Eteocles and Polynices, chips off the old block, seeking in avant-garde books for texts to justify their sleeping with their sisters.

Though comedy forms an essential part of the play's structure, the third and last act offers a kind of tragedy that is none the less authentic for being self-conscious. Gide's Oedipus knows how to snatch victory from defeat. The discovery that Jocasta is his mother in a sense liberates him:

> I married my mother—alas! alas!—and with her all my past. I see now why my valor slumbered. In vain did the future call to me. Jocasta drew me backward—Jocasta, who tried in her madness to suppress what had to be, whom I loved as a hubsand and, all unwittingly, as a son. . . . Now it is time. Leave me! I am breaking the cord that binds us.

These words might well have been addressed by Gide to Madeleine, who was, after all, very like his mother in character, education, religious convictions, as well as being related to her by blood. After her destruction of his letters, he was to some extent liberated from her hold over him and did not much longer hesitate to avow *Corydon* and to finish *Si le grain ne meurt*.

Even Oedipus' blinding of himself seems a fresh and final assertion of his individuality against God, an *acte gratuit* that defies predestination. Oedipus himself says before the blinding:

> I should like to invent some new form of unhappiness—some mad gesture to astonish you all, and astonish myself, and astonish the gods.

And Tiresias comments after it:

> God did not expect this new forfeit in payment for your early crimes.

Yet perhaps even the blinding, like Gide's insistence on revealing to the world the homosexuality that his nature imposed on him, was itself a compulsive act:

> Doubtless my offering of myself was also foreseen, so that I could not but have made it. No matter! Willingly do I sacrifice myself. I had gone so far that I could go farther only by turning in violence against myself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I could offer several more parallels between Gide's biography and *Oedipus*, but even the ones I have already given make me guilty of the error for which I have been condemning March. Ultimately, these parallels are all beside the point. To be the masterpiece I believe it is, *Oedipus* must have universal application; its affirmation of individualism must stir a reader or spectator who knows nothing of Gide except the play before him—though of course he will have to know something of Sophocles' Oedipus. I believe it *will* stir him, just as *The Immoralist* or *Si le grain ne meurt* can deeply move those for whom homosexuality holds no terrors and no temptations.

What sort of a Gide literature, then, do we in America need during the next decade or so? First, let us hope that everything he wrote will be carefully translated and kept in print. At the moment, the works most needing translation are *Paludes, Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* (a translation of this appeared in England in 1919, but is long out of print), and *Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue.*

Next, I doubt if a satisfactory biography can or should be written in the next twenty years. When all the memoirs of Gide's associates and all the important correspondences have been published, when all the personal squabbles and ideological controversies have died down, then we can have a biography that is not too highly colored by either Gide's own view of himself or any of the partisan approaches that are inevitable at this short distance from his time.

Another thing besides partisan biography that we don't particularly need just now is a psychoanalytic study. It could only classify Gide, pointing out where he is similar to other "cases" and ignoring what makes him unique.

What we *do* need is a lot more close analysis of the kind to which Guerard subjects the novels—analysis not only of structure and strategy but, for those with some knowledge of French, close verbal analysis. Someone should put a bunch of graduate students to work on Gide's *language.* Aside from Arabic and Italian loan-words, Gide must use a smaller vocabulary than most French writers since the eighteenth century, or even since the seventeenth. This classical pruning of vocabulary plus a slightly archaic syntax plus a uniquely personal (and slightly precious) prose rhythm have won him almost universal recognition in France as a stylist. I might add to this list one other quality, which I can only call Latinity; I sense in him a tendency to choose words of unimpeachably Latin etymology; many of his sentences would go very easily into Latin. The results of such a study as I have suggested would eventually filter through to those who know no French and would help to redress the now seriously disordered balance between Gide the man and Gide the artist.

About what we may *expect* in the next few years I am not very sanguine. Now that even sober folk like Professor March are mildly pointing the way, we shall eventually have a pocket biography of André Gide that promises to bare all. The only doubt in my mind concerns whether there will be a picture of Mériem on the cover, or actually one of an Arab boy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARVIN MUDRICK

Chaucer and What We Make of Him

THE CANTERBURY TALES, by *Geoffrey Chaucer*. A New Translation by *Nevill Coghill*. Penguin Books. $1.25 (cloth, $2.75).

In an age of criticism, Chaucer is the only major English poet whose claim remains traditional and unexamined. His poems have long ceased to excite the clinching aphorisms of poets and literary journeymen like his French contemporary Deschamps and his first publisher, Caxton; he has become the undefend victim of appreciations by relaxing annotators; and no critic or boned-up set of critical principles, however efficient with Shakespeare or Milton or the Metaphysicals, has succeeded in verifying or even making plausible the professorial legend of Chaucer's magnitude. Except out of college texts, he is now unread, and his legend is taken most publicly on faith by those academics whose condescension betrays them.

Five hundred years ago Caxton observed that Chaucer "writeth no void words, but his matter is full of high and quick sentence" [*i.e.*, sense, axiomatic wisdom]. In the ambience of a critical terminology haunted by Shakespearean metaphor and self-regarding Miltonic or Melvillean rhetoric, Caxton's remark appears modest or trivial: that all of Chaucer's words make solid, important, lively sense. They make sense in a totally expressive vernacular, based on the last classless popular English and drawing familiarly on the whole common fund of medieval culture, an idiom uniquely hospitable to all things seen as well as all ways of seeing. Chaucer had historical advantages, and his style is unexampled in its use of them.

That it is also a style compatible with and renewing itself from the severest and most musical verse forms, that in its absolute discipline over a variety and subtlety, a strength and justness of tone it makes, by the comparison at least, Pope and Donne seem coarse-grained and Marvell a hothouse flower—these facts might especially tend to discourage translators. But the market persists. If Chaucer is not read, up-to-date versions of him are: Mr. Coghill's is the second modernization of *The Canterbury Tales* offered to the American public, both in "popular-priced" editions, within three years, and *Time* (which credits Mr. Coghill with "de-quainting" Chaucer) has rated it "the poetic service of the year". The question remains whether a new Englishing of Chaucer can adequately suggest, or improve on, its original.

The Man of Law's Tale is, in effect if not in strict fact, one of Chaucer's saint's legends, a limited genre even for him; and, for what complexity of interest it has, it depends chiefly on the sustaining of a tone of grave and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perfect piety, against the danger of bathos or cleverness, within a very formal metrical scheme. This is Chaucer's Constance falsely accused:

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
And swich a colour in his face hath had
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad,
Amonges alle the faces in that route?
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute.

O queenes, lyvynge in prosperitee,
Duchesses, and ye ladyes everichone,
Haveth som routhe on hire adversitee!
An emperoures doghter stant allone;
She hath no wight to whom to make hir mone.
O blood roial, that stondest in this drede,
Fer been thy freendes at thy grete nede!

This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun,
As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee,
That from his eyen ran the water doun. . . .

And this is Mr. Coghill's:

Have you not some time seen a paler face
Among the crowd, of one who has been led
Towards his death and has obtained no grace?
Ah, what a color in his face, how dead!
Who would not know that he was sore bested
Among those other faces, singled out?
So also Constance stood, and gazed about.

O Queens abiding in prosperity,
You Duchesses and Ladies, hearts of stone
Would have compassion on her misery;
An Emperor's daughter, there she stands alone,
Without a soul to whom she can make moan!
O royal blood, standing in greatest need
And deadly fear, far are thy friends indeed!

King Alla felt compassion for her fears;
A noble heart feels pity. At her look
He was unable to restrain his tears. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chaucer's "pale" becomes Coghill's pointless or pointlessly smart comparative. The desperate invention "how dead!" finishes off, to the very mark of exclamation, Chaucer's quiet line 4. "Singled out" (line 6), again for the sake of rhyme and extra syllables, explicates and dulls the dreadful loneliness implicit in Chaucer's crowd. "Hearts of stone" (line 9) and a declarative sentence replace Chaucer's earnest imperative. "Without a soul" (line 12) lathers up Chaucer's impersonal "no wight" [nobody]. Chaucer's lines 15 and 16 are banally "expanded", again to fill metrical holes. Coghill's line 17 it would be charitable to ignore; he may have been driven to it by the conviction that Chaucer's simple image must be de-quainted. And the list of misdemeanors does not include certain inevitable losses in the change, not of words, but of sounds: the squeezing of the Chaucerian line now that the neutral *e* (*palë facë, myghtë, amongës, freendës*) is no longer pronounced, the trimming of almost two full syllables from Chaucer's appropriately sonorous *emperoures*, the loss of *compassioun* as a rhyme word.

Consider the Wife of Bath's energetic, unsentimental nostalgia:

> *But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me*
> *Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,*
> *It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.*
> *Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote*
> *That I have had my world as in my tyme. . . .*

which Coghill modernizes:

> *But Christ! Whenever it comes back to me,*
> *When I recall my youth and jollity,*
> *It fairly warms the cockles of my heart!*
> *This very day I feel a pleasure start,*
> *Yes, I can feel it tickling at the root.*
> *Lord, how it does me good! I've had my fruit,*
> *I've had my world and time, I've had my fling!*

Coghill takes seven lines, one couplet entirely redundant, to Chaucer's five. The lingering spondee "Lord Crist" has its pathos and irony truncated to the plainest monosyllabic oath. The characteristic Wifely vigor of line 3 becomes Coghill's cliché. Why Coghill alters the easily translatable meaning of the sentence in lines 4 and 5, it would be hard to explain; or why, except for a possible discomfort over the expletive "as", he substitutes for the magnificent fifth line his own choppy seventh culminating in another most un-Wifely cliché. The result, in any case, is neither Chaucer's poem nor anyone else's.

The blight is general. Chaucer's treatment of the Prioress is one of his most urbane and delicate demolitions, a smothering by harmless worldly images. Of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chaucer's "And peyned hire to countrefete cheere/Of court," Coghill makes ". . . and straining/To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace"; although "peyned hire" is no stronger than "took pains", and "countrefete" means "imitate" with none of the necessary implications, in the modern "counterfeit", of fraud and deception. In the somber dignity of The Pardoner's Tale, Coghill finds "youngsters" the present equivalent of "yonge folk". The head and face of Chaucer's unmonkish Monk are said to be shining "as he hadde been enoynt"; Coghill prefers "greased" to the accurate translation, "anointed". Chaucer remarks that the amorous Friar "hadde maad ful many a mariage/Of yonge wommen at his owene cost"; and Coghill, anxious that the reader catch on, sets his can-opener to Chaucer's slyness: "He'd fixed up many a marriage giving each/Of his young women what he could afford her."

At times, in fact, one is allowed to be aware of nothing but this unsubduable gift for weakening, coarsening, platitudinizing, and mistranslating, often in the absence of any particular metrical obligation, even where Chaucer's own words are usable with only orthographic changes. "Ther was the revel and the melodye" (the Miller savoring the joys of Nicholas and Alisoun) turns up as "The revels started and the melody". A bit later, "In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas" becomes "At busy play in eager quest of fun". The Reeve's Miller of Trumpington is ringingly infuriated by the student ("clerk") who has taken advantage of his hospitality:

> *". . . A, false traitour! false clerk!" quod he,*
> *"Thou shalt be deed, by Goddes dignitee! . . ."*

which dissolves into Coghillian soap opera:

> *". . . You beast! You treacherous blackguard! Filthy rat!*
> *God's dignity! I'll murder you for that! . . ."*

The Nun's Priest, authenticating his cock-and-fox story, insists:

> *This storie is also trewe, I undertake,*
> *As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,*
> *That wommen holde in ful greet reverence. . . .*

which Coghill finickily alters in the second line, and in the last mistranslates into irrelevance:

> *My story is as true, I undertake,*
> *As that of good Sir Lancelot du Lake*
> *Who held all women in such high esteem.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As the tale approaches its moral tag,

> *This cok, that lay upon the foxes bak,*
> *In al his drede unto the fox he spak. . . .*

the second line of which Coghill renders, "In all his dread contrived to give a quack". In a world where roosters, not content with speaking, contrive to quack, it is perhaps too much to ask that a translator be faithful to the text or make good sense of his own. It would be instructive to learn what Caxton, confronted by silliness, void words, gross overinflections and errors of tone, a no-man's language in paralytic meters, would make of *this* Chaucer.

For an admirer of the poet whom in a ballade of praise Deschamps, after comparing him to Socrates in philosophy, Seneca in moral teaching, and Ovid in poetry, hails climactically as "Grand translateur, noble Geffroy Chaucier," the issue can hardly be translation *per se*. The art of translation is, in fact, various enough to deserve distinctions and degrees, particularly since Mr. Coghill's Chaucer has received such favorable publicity on its usefulness (even the down-the-nose scholarly accolade: so Professor Kemp Malone—". . . an engaging substitute . . . not a literal rendering, but a version faithful to the metrical form and, above all, to the tone [!] of Chaucer's verse . . ."), with comfortably vague implications of the usefulness of translation in general; as if this sort of styleless and tasteless parasitism is representative of the whole hierarchic art. It is not, however; and we shall see where it belongs if we distinguish the several degrees.

The first is paraphrase, backbone of freshman Shakespeare exams: State in clear, straightforward, modern English what the following passage means. The implicit aesthetic, that imagery is merely decorative and that one comprehends a poem by stripping it of "poetic" details, is a heresy by no means restricted to mythophiles and English professors. The second degree is the making available to a larger public of philosophical, moral, scientific, and aesthetic source-books which are, for the translator's immediate purpose at least, not primarily works of art. King Alfred translated Boethius for his time, and Chaucer for his; and Chaucer also that grab-bag of courtly and anti-courtly abstractions, the *Roman de la Rose*: the schoolboy's crib is of course a debased modern instance. The third is the absorption of a great poet into the idiom of a poet less great and convinced of the superiority of his own idiom: Dryden's Chaucer, Chapman's Homer and Pope's. The fourth degree is the least often achieved, and yet the one that most translators like to think they are aiming at: the transfer of as much of a great original as possible—tone, imagery, idiom—into a different language and often a different time, with as little intrusion as possible, except where they provide adequate analogues, of the translator's own idiom or the idiom of his time. It is a job which does not seem to interest the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

greatest poets, who would rather explore possibilities than find equivalents for other poets' final statements—Chaucer, for example, did not translate Dante, though he knew him thoroughly and learned from him—but it is a job which, if it is to be done at all, must be done by poets of talent and unlimited honesty, perseverance, and humility; in our time, we have Laurence Binyon's Dante. The fifth degree is exclusive to poets of the first rank: the discovering, appropriating, and exploring by the translator, through his own idiom and for his own purposes, of possibilities in a relatively inferior or not primarily poetic work. The transcendent exemplar is Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde,* the most civilized and humanely tragic of Christian poems, out of Boccaccio's erotic romance *Il Filostrato;* Shakespeare, shoveling North's prose into his last-period blank verse, is doing it there as well as elsewhere almost continuously; and, at a respectful distance, Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius,* the great unknown poem of our century.

Mr. Coghill, like most translators, seems to believe that his performance succeeds as intact transfer: it has a "fidelity more fundamental", he says in his preface, than the surface fidelity of the crib. He is right: it makes a poor crib. Actually, when he is not mistranslating or vindictively racking the shrunken Chaucerian line or taking occasional advantage of directly usable words and rhymes, his translation is academic paraphrase, an attempt to "get at" meaning even if it means to discard images, to wreck idiom, and to caricature tone, in a language with no discoverable center or voice, and all of it compulsively embraced by rhyme.

A failure in translating Chaucer does not result merely from lack of talent. To translate Chaucer into modern English is to translate English into English. A poet may find equivalents in his own language for words, tones, even the sounds and phrase-lengths of a poem in a foreign language; but how is one to find equivalents for words and phrases still current and yet different in tone and idiom, impossibly different in sonority and syllabication? The language itself is in the way: the only equivalents we have are Chaucer's own words and rhythms, and they are equivalent only in the language of his time. The proof comes early, in what Mr. Coghill makes of the very first, familiar lines:

> *When the sweet showers of April fall and shoot*
> *Down through the drought of March to pierce the root,*
> *Bathing every vein in liquid power*
> *From which there springs the engendering of the flower,*
> *When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath*
> *Exhales an air in every grove and heath*
> *Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun*
> *His half-course in the sign of the* Ram *has run,*
> *And the small fowl are making melody*
> *That sleep away the night with open eye. . . .*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Disregard, for the moment, such Coghillisms as the roller-coaster run-on "shoot/Down" and the gasoline-ad "liquid power"; disregard the vanishing of Chaucer's absolutely functional key-word rhymes neither imprisoned by the couplet nor dangling in futile enjambments: Mr. Coghill is no poet. It remains generally true that Chaucer's unhurried energy and expansiveness, his always limpid and directed fluidity over the rock-solid toughness, are transferable into no other English. We still have most of his words, and no better ones, but they have been trimmed into brusqueness; and his line itself—a lighter and longer line, with its frequent sounded neutral *e* especially at the end, than the post-Chaucerian pentameter—has been fatally trimmed. What is an English-speaking reader to do with so simple a Chaucerian couplet as

And smalë fowelës maken melodyë
That slepen al the nyght with open yë

except admire it and leave it in the memory?

The embarrassing question persists: What about the interested public that cannot read Chaucer? Landor, asked to contribute to a modernization, replied that as many people read Chaucer as are fit to read him. This is not snobbery. Anyone unwilling to take the trouble to use the Chaucer glossary and get up the pronunciation (an easier job than Shakespeare for the modern reader not merely bathing in Elizabethan staginess), yet willing to accept the rags and patches of Chaucer versions, is in fact doubly unfit to read Chaucer. Or, it is tempting to add, any other English poet.

Cummington School of the Arts, Cummington, Mass., offers a few scholarships for writers as well as musicians and painters, of college age or over, to attend the 1953 session, July 6th to August 16th. Anyone interested should submit evidence of eligibility to the director, Mr. Francis Golffing, at Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, before May 1st.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FREDERICK MORGAN

Six Poets[1]

I

When a poet brings out his collected poems, end-product of the work of a lifetime or near-lifetime, we are invited to an effort of evaluation that admittedly can never be final, but that tends to be, at the least, comprehensive. Always assuming that the work possesses that degree of integrity and originality that makes it worth reading in the first place, the intelligent reader will seek to encompass, or reencompass, it as a whole, and to arrive at a balanced sense of what this particular poet's particular contribution is—to art, to the language, to the enlargement of the reader's own understanding. He will tend, more or less purposefully, to hunt out the poet's center of vision and, as best he can, make it his own. If, in addition, he has a professional interest in the craft, he will of course pay special heed to the technical means developed by the poet, with an eye not only to their success in the immediate context, but to their potential viability in other hands. He will watch for the emergence, more or less gradual and predictable, of the authentic vision; he will take note of the strands of influence, successfully absorbed and transmuted, that have contributed to it, and of other influences and stresses that may have hindered; he will be particularly alert to the definitive statement of the vision, if it has come to full flower, in the comparatively small number of poems which he may find to be "finished", and perhaps permanent—or, in exceptional cases, of such magnitude that the lack of finish does not matter. In the course of this process of understanding, which is nothing more than the process of intelligent and sensitive reading, he will necessarily be confronted by large considerations having to do with the development and refinement of talent: considerations of artistic integrity, and of the relations of the poet to the world in which he exists as a man.

Two recent collections of poetry, by Yvor Winters and Archibald MacLeish, have prompted these reflections. Each covers a poetic output of thirty-odd years, and viewed from a certain angle each sheds light, by contrast, on the other. For Winters' poetry gives evidence of a sturdy talent that has grown—slowly and organically—into major proportions; whereas in reading MacLeish, we have little sense of growth, but rather of a delicate and somewhat fragile talent all too often compromised and overextended, which has yet managed to crystallize itself, accidentally as it were, in a handful of fine poems.

---

[1]COLLECTED POEMS 1917-1952, by *Archibald MacLeish*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.00. COLLECTED POEMS, *by Yvor Winters*. Alan Swallow. $3.50. A MASK FOR JANUS, by *W. S. Merwin*. Yale. $2.50. THE DRAGON AND THE UNICORN, by *Kenneth Rexroth*. New Directions. $3.00. THE PYTHONESS, by *Kathleen Raine*. Farrar, Straus and Young. $2.75. SO LATE INTO THE NIGHT, by *Sydney Goodsir Smith*. Peter Russell (London). 8/6.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MacLeish at his worst is the perpetrator of such hortatory effusions as the *America Was Promises* (1939):

> *We do not ask for Truth now from John Adams.*
> *We do not ask for Tongues from Thomas Jefferson.*
> *We do not ask for Justice from Tom Paine.*
> *We ask for answers.*
>
> *And there is an answer.*
>
> *There is Spain Austria Poland China Bohemia.*
> *There are dead men in the pits in all those countries.*

Etc. When he is off on this tack, the poet asks for answers, and finds them, everywhere except in doing the job that is in front of his nose—i.e., writing poetry. The liberal-pamphleteering poems that date from the New Deal era—and very dated they are—are probably the worst; but this kind of basic uncertainty of purpose seems to have dogged MacLeish throughout his career, largely vitiating, in my opinion, his poetic accomplishment. It is as if there were some nervous compulsion to retreat from the hard task of making verse, and to seek refuge in a more reassuring external reality. Many of the early poems—*The Hamlet of A. MacLeish* is a good example—exist in a somnambulistic state of outward yearning: they aspire to a condition of not-poetry. This is what accounts for their strange fuzziness and insubstantiality, and also for the poet's inclination to bite off more than he can chew: notably in the long poems, all of which, with the partial exception of *Conquistador,* are limply discursive and lack poetic vitality. The poet reads his Pound and Eliot, his Perse and Apollinaire and J. G. Frazer, but he fails to grip himself at his own creative center. And later, lacking contact with his own proper vision and talent, he fastens on to liberalism as an external prop—and the poetry, in large measure, disappears.

What is surprising in all this is not, God help us, that a young poet should be uncertain as to how to bring his talent to bear, nor that his work should be full of "influences"; it is rather that in MacLeish's case the obvious influences seem largely irrelevant to his own best poetic impulses: they pervade the surface, but do not penetrate the depths.[2] It is still more surprising that he could so mistake his talent, or lose faith in it, as to descend to depths of drab platitude and triviality after writing, in the period before 1933, several very

[2]*Conquistador,* MacLeish's most extended long poem and also his most successful, may seem to be an exception. Despite obtrusive mannerisms of style, it is, on a certain level, a remarkable technical accomplishment. And it could not have been written without the examples of Pound and the *Anabase.* But I cannot believe that MacLeish is writing from his own center of vision here; rather, he has temporarily appropriated the sensibilities of other men. For this reason, *Conquistador* seems to me to have been a dead end, for MacLeish and for epic poetry. Its glamor now seems largely reflected, its texture flabby and inspiration hollow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good poems of unmistakable originality. There is a radical uncertainty here, I submit, a confusion between poetry and "communication" still operative, it would seem, in the tedious philosophising of *Actfive* (1948) and the thin didacticism of the 1952 radio-play, *The Trojan Horse.*

But it is time to see this poet at his best, or close to it. Here is "The Treachery" (section iii from the sequence "The Woman on the Stair"):

As a candle flame is straight within the curve of hands
So strictly stands

That moment in the violence of the snow.
Although the wind could blow,

Although the white unable wandering of the air
Whirled everywhere,

Although the storm drove wildly through the winter street,
The unnamed sudden doubt of her deceit

Stood in that violence like a breathless flame.
Where wildest winter came

There stood as still as candle to the palm
The desperate heart's inexplicable calm.

One admires the sureness and delicacy of touch here, the precise adjustment of imagery to emotion; above all, the rhythmic fluidity and the skilful variations of meter. The expression comes direct, rings true; there are no obtrusive echoes. This fine poem stands almost alone in the group, revealingly entitled *Public Speech,* of 1936. There are a few others, equally accomplished, written earlier. The successful poems have in common a directness of emotional grasp (they are essentially lyric: several are love-poems), the absence of "larger significance", and a fine rhythmic utterance. It is true that they tend to be fragile, nostalgic, "minor"; they nevertheless suggest what MacLeish might have accomplished had he—with his real technical fluency—concentrated on problems of craft and form.

For the most part, MacLeish's shorter poems show him neither at his best nor his worst. There is the pervasive blur and unfulfillment, the poetic promise almost continuously aborted by a reliance on flat "communication"; yet the promise remains. This is still the situation in the "New Poems" (1951-52), assembled here for the first time. We have the direct poetic simplicity of "Thunderhead", the direct antipoetic statement of "The Black Day", and many gradations between; including one poem, "The Sheep in the Ruins"—with its fine line, "A man beneath the sunlight in his meaning"—which, despite a certain textural flabbiness, indicates a possible mode of reconciliation of the lyric and didactic impulses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In one of the worst of these new poems, "The Snowflake Which Is Now and Hence Forever", MacLeish deprecates his art ("Birdseye scholar of the frozen fish") and attempts to justify his own retreats into the flux:

They also live
Who swerve and vanish in the river.

Unfortunate: this fish could do more than "swerve and vanish", if it chose.

Yvor Winters is, I now strongly suspect, our great unacknowledged contemporary poet. His *Collected Poems* reveal an aloof and uncompromising talent that has remained unswervingly true to itself, and found its proper fulfillment. I have always admired certain of the individual poems—in particular, the magnificent "Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight"—but had no real idea, until reading the present volume, of how much he has done and how well he has done it. I think many have shared in this unawareness, for several reasons; and it is to be hoped that Winters will now at last receive the acknowledgement that is his due. This book makes clear his place among our five or six best living poets.

The following poem is entitled "A Testament—to one now a child":

We will and move: the gain
Is purchased with our pain;
The very strength we choose
With what we lose.

God is revealed in this:
That some go not amiss,
But through hard labor teach
What we may reach.

These gave us life through death:
Jesus of Nazareth,
Archaic Socrates,
And such as these.

O small and fair of face!
In this appalling place,
The conscious soul must give
Its life to live.

Not all of the poems are so prevailingly abstract in utterance, but this is a fine example of Winters at almost his best, and at almost his most austere. The unwary may give such a poem a superficial reading and turn away with the notion that it is an example of mere traditionalism, form without substance. This would be a very serious error, attributable partly to laziness, partly to a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prejudice that poetry in our time must show the mark of the dominant modes and influences to be taken seriously. A careful reading will reveal the poem's rightness, its modesty, dignity and perfection. Consider again the first stanza: the depth and extent of what is being said, the directness and simplicity of the saying. Consider the power of the last stanza, in its mature and hard-earned awareness. It should become apparent that the simple language is charged with depths of meaning, and that the metrical form, delicate and precise, holds great forces in balance.

This kind of mastery may be hard for our age to understand, but the joys of contemplating it are very great. Readers of poetry today are accustomed to highly-charged systems of imagery, and to poetic statement that is violent, dramatic and disjunctive. They are less accustomed, it is to be feared, to beauties of thought and language that are rational and discursive, even though they be regulated by as fine a sensitivity to the human condition. It is hard for us to realize that abstract language in poetry is not necessarily dead, platitudinous language—some excellent contemporary critics have proceeded on just such an assumption. And, of course, we have some justification for our suspicions. There *was* a balance to be righted, a job of house-cleaning to be done. Conventionalized abstraction, academic and gutless, was for many years (and still is, in the most reactionary circles) the substance of bad poetry.

But the poems of Yvor Winters, with very few exceptions, are impressively alive and vibrant, both where the language is prevailingly "abstract" and where it is prevailingly "concrete". In fact, his abstractions take on concreteness through the precision with which they are rendered; and his particulars take on general significance, in the way of the best traditional poetry, by virtue of the humanity and the maturity of the vision which they help to enunciate. This talent has been altogether true to itself, I have said: it has absorbed only what it can use, and that to the full. The great Tudor poets—poets of style rather than "personality", who are for the most part so regrettably little read today—these Winters has made his own. Their sense of style, metrical discipline and moral vigor have been assimilated in his poetry, without sacrifice of his individual insight, but rather to its reinforcement. Similarly, the early influence of imagism, the prosodic researches and experimentation with free verse, have borne fruit in a developed precision of imagery and sense of syllabic weight, and in the strength and lightness of individual lines within a prevailing metric pattern. Consider the last stanza of "A Spring Serpent":

Kin to the petal, cool,
Translucent, veinëd, firm,
The fundamental worm,
The undefinëd fool,
Dips to the icy pool.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sense of the object is as acute as in the most rigorous imagist practice; in addition, whole areas of traditional association are brought to fresh life by the phrases "fundamental worm" and "undefinëd fool".

There is much more to be said about Winters; what I wish to emphasize is the maturity of his poetry and its moral authority. (This last has nothing to do with moral earnestness, with didacticism or preaching.) A poem like "The Marriage", in its ripeness and fullness of experience, makes most love poetry of today seem adolescent by comparison. In its attitude towards life and death, Winters' poetry attains at times the moral grandeur typical of the finest works of the great humanist tradition: the tradition that accords the fullest respect to man and his reason while retaining a stern awareness of human limitations. Here is the second stanza of "To the Holy Spirit", in my opinion one of the finest poems to be written by an American. The setting is "a deserted graveyard in the Salinas Valley":

High noon returns the mind
Upon its local fact:
Dry grass and sand; we find
No vision to distract.
Low in the summer heat,
Naming old graves, are stones
Pushed here and there, the seat
Of nothing, and the bones
Beneath are similar:
Relics of lonely men,
Brutal and aimless, then
As now, irregular.

The best of these poems have an austere and muscular power, a directness and fullness of expression, that are almost unmatched since Yeats.

II

The recent months have unfortunately not been productive of much good new poetry, but there is one outstanding first book, W. S. Merwin's *A Mask for Janus*. Merwin is a capable craftsman, with a real concern for the possibilities of formal utterance. He is primarily occupied, not with the expression of his own thoughts and emotions as such, but with extending and enriching them by exploration of the potentialities of traditional expression. He has thus, as a poet, given himself room in which to grow; and, in fact, over the past five years his work has developed with sureness and rapidity.

Merwin's poetry is notable, I should say, for a language in which abstractions charged with a peculiarly restless energy are combined with exact and care-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fully weighed particulars; for a technical resilience that is clearly the result of much metrical and rhythmic experimentation—including the use of foreign verse-forms as models; and for its exploration of the materials of legend and myth. (This last preoccupation suggests possibilities that are particularly interesting.) Even his faults are ingratiating: the language sometimes tightens into tense nervous knots, but it never dissolves into mush.

The best poems are rather too long to be given in full here. Instead, I should like to quote the opening stanzas of three of them, hoping thereby to give some sense of the range of the work, and of its individual tone. Here is the beginning of the admirable "Ballad of John Cable and Three Gentlemen":

He that had come that morning,
One after the other,
Over seven hills,
Each of a new color,

Came now by the last tree,
By the red-colored valley,
To a gray river
Wide as the sea.

There at the shingle
A listing wherry
Awash with dark water;
What should it carry? . . .

The texture is clear and firm; the versification skilful. Consider next the first stanza of his "Sestina", with its fluidity of motion in which the particular images yet retain their clarity and weight:

Where I came by torchlight there is dawn-song:
Leaves remembering, sudden as a name
Recalled from nowhere, remembering morning,
Fresh wind in high grass, cricket on plowshare,
Whisper of stream in the green-shadowed place,
Thrush and tanager keeping season. . . .

Finally, the "Dictum: For a Masque of Deluge", with its integrated complexity:

There will be the cough before the silence, then
Expectation; and the hush of portent
Must be welcomed by a diffident music
Lisping and dividing its renewals;
Shadows will lengthen and sway, and, casually
As in a latitude of diversion
Where growth is topiary, and the relaxed horizons

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Are accustomed to the trespass of surprise,
One with a mask of Ignorance will appear
Musing on the wind's strange pregnancy. . . .

The writer of these lines is already one of our best younger poets; there is every indication that he will continue to grow.

Kenneth Rexroth's *The Dragon and the Unicorn* gives rise to other, and less happy, speculations. I open the book at random and quote (p. 47):

The person is transcended
By the reflexion of himself
In the other in love, the
Unique is universalized
In the dual, any important
Crux of reality is
Only the emergence of
A person into a love
Perspective, experience
Has no other real content.
Heavy bicycling all morning,
Down hill in second gear against
A pounding southeast wind from the
Mediterranean. . . .

The book is 171 pages long, and consists entirely of rough travel notes interspersed with patches of home-made "philosophy" and aggressive ventings of opinions that are for the most part ill-formed and unintelligent. The fact that Rexroth is presumably a "colorful" personality with "unconventional" opinions (but how conventional his type of revolt really is: anarchism, anti-intellectualism and watered-down Lawrence) is implicitly taken as justification for his failure to do any work, either as poet or as thinker. The whole conglomerate mass, broken into limp and nerveless units that can only be called "lines" out of deference to the typesetter, is presented as "one of the crucial poetic statements of our age," and "an indictment of the present state of 'western civilization' ". But boil the thing down to its essence; it's not worth one stanza by Merwin or three consecutive words of Winters. One does not wish to be needlessly unkind to botched work; what grates on the nerves with books of this sort (and they are not scarce) is not the simple lack of talent, towards which one can always be charitable, but the effrontery of their pretensions.

Two recent books[3] by British poets should be noted: Kathleen Raine's *The*

[3]I would add, too, W. S. Graham's *The White Threshold*, recently published in this country by the Grove Press ($2.25). I reviewed this book in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn 1950 (Vol. III, No. 3), on the occasion of its publication in England; it is still of unusual interest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pythoness and Sydney Goodsir Smith's *So Late Into the Night*. Miss Raine's work is gentle and rather unpretentious, but on the whole disappointing. She writes a nature poetry with mystical overtones (I would suppose that Blake is the master to whom she feels closest); she is sensitive to man's involvement with natural things—stars, water, stones—and to their underlying interrelationships. But all too often this sensibility is unfocussed. What I miss is clarity of grasp, precision of tone and strength of utterance. "Out of Nothing", one of her better poems, will make the point:

Within the centre of the rose
Seed out of the silence grows

Its crimson heart the night enfolds
The atom's void, the source of worlds

From whose unfathomed chaos rise
Star and leviathan from interior skies.

Here build a house where love may come
From the ends of darkness home,

Here the virgin waits alone
For her lover, for her son,

Here the mother wraps her child
In warm dress of flesh and blood

Pitying love's nakedness,
Love, the child of the abyss.

I can't help feeling that this poem depends largely on traditional associations that have not been seized integrally by the poet or renewed by her own vision. The poetic effect is insecure, and the closer one looks, the more insecure it gets. In too many of these poems the texture is soft or "floating", the rhythm somewhat listless, the emotion unearned.

So Late Into the Night is a collection of fifty lyrics, mostly love poems, in the Scots language (it should *not*, I understand, be referred to as a "dialect"), rounded out by a four-page glossary; paper-bound, with dust-jacket, nicely made: one of the first two books[4] to be published by Peter Russell, the editor of *Nine*. Sydney Goodsir Smith writes a direct and simple poetry of the emotions—not an easy thing to do—which at its best is reminiscent of Burns; he works in conventional stanza-forms and regular, clearly defined meters. The only difficulty comes from the frequent use of Scots terms (many of which,

[4]The other is the *Collected Poems* of J. P. Angold, a young English poet much concerned with monetary reform, who was killed in the Second World War. One or two of the poems are good, but on the whole they show more promise than fulfillment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though, are readily understandable), and I should say that the reader is well repaid for his necessary trips to the glossary. The short poem "Gin But . . ." ("If But . . ."), which I quote in full, gives a clear idea of what this poet can do:

Maist tender tigress,
Sweet voluptuarie,
Maist leesome maistress
Sae fou o lemanrie,
The sun is spielan,
The nicht is wearie—
Gin the nicht was leelang
Lintie dearie . . .

("Leesome"="loving and/or beloved"; "fou"="full, drunken"; "lemanrie" ="illicit or physical love, sensuality, *volupté*"; "spielan"="climbing"; "leelang"="livelong"; "lintie"="linnet".) There is no denying this poem's freshness and charm, nor the fact that they are chiefly attributable to the use of the Scots words. If proof is required, one need only attempt to "translate" the poem into English. (Could one even get away with "tigress" in the first line? In a plain English context it begins to sound silly.) The whole question of the Scots language and its use today raises problems beyond the scope of a review[5]; here we need only note that when Sydney Goodsir Smith is writing at his best, the Scots is integral to the poetry and irreplaceable: it gives muscle and precision to statements that would be flat in English; further, that at his best, this poet is very well worth listening to. For my own part, I must say that I prefer him in his most devil-may-care vein. Such poems of light-hearted sensuality as "King and Queen of the Four Airts" have a lilt and verve based on real strength of perception; I am not certain that he is as successful when he attempts sterner effects. Nor am I certain that the work is invariably free of platitude and the stock response. The fact remains that this is a writer of talent and originality, who has given us poems of admirable freshness.

[5]There is a direct connection between Lollans verse and the Scottish Nationalist movement; Smith's modern poetic father is Hugh Macdiarmid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT M. ADAMS

The Opera House of His Ego

TO THE HAPPY FEW, *Selected Letters of Stendhal,* tr. from the French by *Norman Cameron,* with an introduction by *Emmanuel Boudot-Lamotte.* Grove Press. $5.00.

"PEUT-ÊTRE EST-IL EXAGÉRÉ de dire que le meilleur roman de Stendhal c'est sa vie." With this backhanded assertion M. Henri Martineau begins his two-volume *Le Coeur de Stendhal;* and to some such words as these, more or less apologetic in tone, a study of Stendhal almost inevitably recurs. Fortunately, they are not true. The life of Stendhal is extraordinarily crowded with incident —crowded, like a great cheese, with those maggots of dramatic pose and analysis which, to the taste of a Beyliste, are the most savory morsels of all literature— but too crowded ever to reduce into a single shapely "roman". M. Paul Arbelet constructed no less than five exquisitely comic romances out of the first 23 years of Stendhal's life. But nearly forty busy years remain. A novel of Stendhal's life in half a hundred volumes, à la Jules Romains? Not even the most fervent Beyliste, his taste unjaded by the 79 volumes into which the works of Stendhal himself have now accordioned, could face such a project with equanimity.

The book under review makes some effort to reduce these formidable dimensions. The ten volumes of *Correspondance* in M. Martineau's Divan edition are here condensed by M. Emmanuel Boudot-Lamotte and translated by Mr. Norman Cameron into a mere 384 pages of stiff literal English. About a quarter of the letters translated have been excerpted; none of the replies are included, and the annotation is spectacularly inadequate. You can get something of the same effect by playing a phonograph record at twice its proper speed—a furiously modulated, highpitched, unaccented quack. Proper names fly past the reader like flakes of blizzard-driven snow; Mante is proposed in Letter 20 as a likely husband for sister Pauline, and immediately disappears from the volume forever. Crozet, Faure, Colomb, the Darus, Mareste, Di Fiore, and of course those tender names Victorine, Adèle, Alexandrine, Mélanie, Angela, Angelina, Giulia, and Métilde bob up with at most a flicker of footnote introduction and depart without a word said. One expects, if one knows the first thing of Henri Beyle, to find him signing his correspondence with such names as Justin Louaut, Cotonet, Dominique, Poverino, Champagne, General Pellet, Méquillet, Jules Pardessus, or even (most extravagant of disguises!) Smith & Co. But unless the reader is already familiar with the *Petit* (578 pp.) *Dictionnaire Stendhalienne,* in which event he will scarcely be the typical reader of *this* book,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the minutiae of Henri Beyle's acquaintance and the significance of the petty events which often occupied him will require more explanation than they receive from the editors of *To the Happy Few*. Need it be added that to produce a book of this character, retailing for $5, and unprovided with an index, borders on mortal sin?

Yet Beyle was of the great letter-writers, and this fact should be paramount on the occasion of his first appearance in English as a correspondent, even though he appears under heavy odds and in a false character. Stendhal would never have written the French equivalent of "All there is are a few little sprigs of lavender" (p. 70), or of "Your beauty makes me wretched in that you do not write to me" (p. 283). He despised everything stiff, pedantic, or gauche, and the most striking quality of his own prose is its quick, compressed energy, an energy too brusque to be called graceful, yet always, and irresistibly, in motion. Perhaps a great novelist, he was beyond all doubt a great writer; but since there was nothing he despised more than the polishing of phrases, a left-handed translation isn't fatal to his style, as it would be, say, to Flaubert's. Indeed, one wouldn't know how to kill the vitality of his writing. It presents no unbroken surfaces, it strangles rhetoric ruthlessly, it shies from the picturesque, it is colloquial, ironic, urbane, and violent. The quality which seasons its most involved passages is relish, Beyle's inexhaustible relish of himself and of everything surrounding him.

For in all his Protean metamorphoses, Stendhal was guided first by a dramatic temperament and only secondarily by ideas. Occasionally as a young man writing to his sister Pauline he falls into the fatal drone of a lecturer; but even then he lectures only against the established lectureships and their associated pomposities. Some Italian philosopher or other is said to have uttered the cross remark that Stendhal never had a single idea; the truth is simply that he never had one idea at a time. His character and his life are a tissue of apparent contraries. Poet and geometrician of the emotions, pseudo-baron and pseudo-grocer, the aristocrat of republicans and the most tenderly inhibited of roués, he deliberately paired off his ideas and from necessity buried them deep. Out of them there happened to grow a temperament; and he finished by creating a world.

It is a world on several distinct levels, a world where that "dissociation of sensibility" which has become such a shibboleth among modern pattern-pointers is exalted into a principle neither pathetic nor symptomatic, but creative. Whether he is conjuring up a policeman's conspiracy or dissecting a lover's vanity, Stendhal gives us a world in depth; as he comments on the grandeur of the King of Naples' buttocks or the touching problem of *le fiasco*, one is made extravagantly aware of the gulfs between symbol and object, sensation and sentiment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the modern critical vocabulary is itself buried in pedantry, which no one would be quicker to repudiate than Stendhal; and we do him no service to suggest that he would have tolerated literary seminarians more gladly than any other breed. "Thirty idiots who have agreed to pretend that they know Mexican";—Stendhal's ruthless public intelligence is nowhere better occupied than in observing the circles, in playing and counter-playing the snob game. His best tone is confidential and urbane. "See," he keeps telling us throughout the letters, "see, things are not as they are made to seem. They never are. In the years since I first bore witness to this fact by biting the cheek of my cousin Pison-Dugalland, I have had occasion to observe the First Consul . . . Monsieur Chateaubriand . . . Signorina Molica and her lover Toto . . . the chambermaid. . . . It is everywhere the same. See, monsieur, I myself. . . ." And the flowered waistcoat comes off, the violet suspenders are removed, trophies ornate with tender initials and dates of remembered triumphs; and we see, we are made to see in evidence of its ordinariness, the heart so curiously compounded of Saint Teresa in her sunken tower and Diogenes in his cynic tub. It is a charming, vulgar display, out of all taste ostensibly, but managed with shrewd discretion and a fine, cool eye to dramatic effect. In the opera house of his ego Stendhal is at once musician, librettist, prima donna, impresario, and the subject of the comedy. How else could he manage to combine a taste for Correggio, Ariosto, and Cimarosa with a grander standard of feeling for the severe merits of Helvetius, Saint-Simon, and the Code Civil? The combination transcends unaccountably any element of it.

Stendhal is read in 1953, as he confidently anticipated, and he will be read in 2053; partly, no doubt, as a curiosity, a "worthy", perhaps even as a vulgar amorist, though his character contained, as has been finely said, "nothing of the Don Juan except the desire to be one". But his chief claim on our interest is the glorious comedy of his own personality as he created it, defying and fulfilling art. Stendhal's life is not his best novel; it is a bigger, more wonderful experiment, of which the novels merely provide final proof. One hopes that Mr. Matthew Josephson's recent tired biography and the present scant selection of letters are but the harbingers of displays more tantalizing and revealing—and that Stendhal, if never precisely "domesticated" in English, may yet become a part of that wild romantic landscape which Keats located so precisely in the human psyche.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. W. B. LEWIS

Eccentrics' Pilgrimage

FICTION IS ALIVE IN AMERICA—here is a fact which must be taken into account by inquirers into its death. The novels[1] I shall consider suggest both a continuing and renewed vitality: a vitality consisting as it ought to of something old, something new and something borrowed. We may, as a consequence, observe with some satisfaction a fertile variety in two directions: variety of content and form (the tender re-rendering of the nineteenth-century fable of the American abroad, by Miss Sarton, for example, contrasted with the fresh and somewhat convulsive experimentings in first novels by Mr. Ellison and Miss O'Connor); and, not less important, a variety of scope and intention (the frontal assault by Mr. Ellison on the whole of illusion-laden reality as against the skillful restrictions of subject in the freshman work of Mr. Engel). It appears very likely that fiction has at last gotten by the dry season of the war years.

If this is so—and it is good to count our hypothetical blessings for a change, rather than to listen again for hypothetical death-rattles—we will want to know why. Three elements can be mentioned: narrative theme, artistic aim, and something harder to define—call it literary hospitality. These are three thoroughly interdependent elements, a trinity amounting to a poised alertness to the living world. The alertness is what makes fiction possible, but it is only the poise which can make it serious and durable.

An absence of poise has frequently been evident, in the unsettled relation between life and letters in America. Fiction in particular has tended to crowd life too closely, or to turn its back in order to inspect itself in a mirror. The reason alleged is the absence of a stable object to imitate; reality, it is argued, is all a fluid jumble, and has no center; there is not enough of anything for the writer to strike and to hold a poised relation to—and especially a relation of that delicately subversive kind most fruitful for art. Unable to imitate, fiction has slid betimes into one or the other of the two beguiling alternatives. But in fact it is the jumble and the fluidity that have given us our representative native theme. For if there is an American fiction it is this—the adventures likely to befall a centerless individual en route through the flow and conflict of illusions toward some still undisclosed center.

Consider almost any assortment of memorable characters: Hawkeye, Hester

---

[1] A SHOWER OF SUMMER DAYS, by *May Sarton*. Rinehart. $2.75. THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA, by *Ernest Hemingway*. Scribners. $3.00. INVISIBLE MAN, by *Ralph Ellison*. Random House. $3.50. A LENGTH OF ROPE, by *Monroe Engel*. Random House. $3.00. WISE BLOOD, by *Flannery O'Connor*. Harcourt Brace. $3.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Prynne, Huck Finn, Billy Budd, Millie Theale, Sister Carrie, Joe Christmas, Harry Morgan. Are they not ec-centrics? They come at us propelled by some lonely, personal and self-generated power; they are the makers of their own conditions. They are *outsiders,* unlike the classical hero, whose mission is customarily to occupy his own home; but they are outside in a strangely heroic and artistically demanding manner, and so must be distinguished too from their modern European variants—Mann's artists, for example, or Greene's restless spiritual prowlers. The American hero may find his center at last within some existing "world"; he may equally find it in himself and become the first and only member of his private heavenly city. But in any case, he demands as much attention as that other world; and it is here, in the competing dignities of the private and the public worlds, that we have the object for fiction to imitate, and a "life" for fiction to lie peaceably in wait for.

The vitality of recent American fiction is due precisely to the force with which this theme has been detected and exploited. Consider the five novels in question. Miss Sarton tells us about her young heroine, in the next to last sentence of *A Shower of Summer Days,* that "She was 'inside' all that she had been outside of for so long, and she was inside it alone and free"—a denouement her novel has handsomely earned. In the hero of Mr. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* we are offered another image, and a most sympathetic one, of the solitary Hemingway hero—the man who is as always "the essential American soul . . . hard, isolate, stoic and a killer."[2] Mr. Ellison's *Invisible Man* is the Negro heir of all the rootless, searching, self-deceiving American innocents, plunged anew into the disrupting rituals of urban life. Even Mr. Engel's Alexander Forward in *A Length of Rope* and Miss O'Connor's Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* stumble into the arena of their small catastrophes from a comparable position—eccentrics and outsiders, caught in moments of greater and almost unendurable torment, hungering for some relatedness they are bound to smash.

These novels accomplish as much as they do because each of them is content with its own being. The aim of each is simply to exist—and not to atone for some truculence in nature or to affect the course of tomorrow's politics. The theme and the purpose taken together make possible the third element, which we notice in a sort of rejoicing by the language that so much of it has been used before. The rejoicing reflects an undisturbed awareness of previous embodiments of the theme: an awareness which reaches, in some cases, even into the consciousness of the characters. It is not a mark of undue influence, therefore, but a mark of ease and maturity that *A Shower of Summer Days* is intimate with Hawthorne and James; that Faulkner dances occasionally in the meditations of *A Length of Rope;* that Nathaniel West and Kafka have contributed generously to *Wise Blood*; that *Invisible Man* has been fattened on Melville; and that Hemingway—well, that Hemingway is greatly indebted to Hemingway. One

[2]D. H. Lawrence's identifying language for Cooper's Hawkeye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feels that these novels have their degree of being in the community of literature, where, as in every good community, virtues grow through the exercise of friendly relations.

Looking at the novels one by one, we can begin with Miss Sarton's, for hers is in its pleasant way the most old-fashioned. It is an extremely nice story about several extremely nice people, behaving very nicely and very naturally towards each other. They have anxieties, but no terrors; they worry, but they are not guilt-ridden; what happens to them is as significant as they are themselves, which is not very—and yet, significance, like the capacity to love, is strictly *secundum quid*. This small, graceful and somewhat untidy world might have fallen right apart, if tempers had been shorter, if lusts had been less controlled by habits of humor and wisdom; or if Miss Sarton had been less bold. *A Shower of Summer Days* is a fine instance of that fiction of the second level (by no means the second rate) of which we need far more than we usually get.

"At long last," the novel begins, "the Gordons were expected home at Dene's Court, the house in Ireland which Violet Dene Gordon had inherited"—and there you have it: the assured narrative glance outwards from the center of things known and continuing. The English convention would settle for a leisurely examination of the center as revisited; the American convention requires that this center, these persons and things, homes and inheritances, be confronted from without by the inexperienced visitor from America: here, the young niece, Sally, dispatched abroad for the summer to get her away from an unfavorably regarded lover. Sally, who is awkward and charming, begins by resenting the old world's satisfied enjoyment of itself; in the course of her swift invasions, she falls in love with Violet, then with her husband Charles, and then with Dene's Court, temporarily upsetting each of them There is much talk, in conscious quotations, about the American and the European; and at the close, Sally, after breaking with her American lover, finds herself "inside" —but not trapped or expatriated; alone and free. This Jamesian anecdote is recounted with something like James's tactics: relationships never stay put, never end anywhere, but are constantly shifting, dissolving, reforming. Miss Sarton's machinery is not as well-geared as James's, to be sure; the story and the relationships sputter a bit sometimes before jolting forwards into new situations. But if the action stammers, the controlling vision is fluent and evenly diffused. Miss Sarton's lyrical and sinuous narrative always seems to know its own strength, which while modest is irreducible.

Hemingway's brief parable of the old fisherman, the giant marlin and the sharks has an authentic beauty, but I doubt if the book can bear the amount of critical weight already piled upon it. I have read a comic-strip parody of it which is less funny than it might be, because the original itself has an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elusive strain of parody—a very faint breath of mockery of the representative Hemingway style and hero and adventure and athletic ritual. The work is not, somehow, altogether and finally *serio* (the Italian word distinguishes, better than its English translation, between the good quality and its corruptions into the stuffy and pretentious); and our assent has to be partially withheld. Yet it has its rare and gentle humanities.

The story (I assume it need not be rehearsed) is an autumnal song celebrating anew and in his old age the staunch, solitary and self-communing figure who has attained to the qualities Hemingway thinks necessary for survival in a wolfish world. In his own right, so to speak, the old man is a moving and even a noble individual; love has gone into him, and goes out of him; he is really, and without insistence, at home with the weather. It is only when his inventor tampers with him, makes him dream of lions on the beach, and the like, that he verges on the antic. His crisis is the classic contest between *virtu* and *fortuna*: between the old man's skill and tenacity ("I know many tricks and have resolution") and the unpredictable swerve of things which Hemingway calls "luck" ("Luck is a thing that comes in many forms and who can recognise her?"). Hemingway has remarked rather often that such is also the crisis of every creative enterprise; and we may be supposed to take the story as an allegory of its own history. If so, however, it is an allegory too banal to warrant much analysis. It is the ultimate sizing up of experience that interests us. And where, at the end of *To Have and Have Not* (1937), the dying Harry Morgan concluded that, "A man alone doesn't have a bloody chance," here the old man, awesomely alone, reflects in all humility that "Man is not made for defeat. . . . A man can be destroyed but not defeated." This is the sign of *virtu* prepared to survive any calamity; even the appalling *fortuna* represented by the sharks, who devour the greatest catch—an eighteen-foot marlin—the old man has ever dreamed of.

Although *The Old Man and the Sea* is not absolutely persuasive, Hemingway regains in it much of the poise so vexatiously missing in the unlucky *Across the River*. The distinction of Hemingway's best work has rested upon the insight by which he managed to avoid the tempting alternatives I have mentioned. "Let those who want to save the world," he once wrote, "if you can get to see it clear and as a whole." In *Across the River*, Hemingway seemed intent on the world's salvation, though for what hodge-podge of purposes, one scarcely dares to guess. Now, with this curiously peaceful account of the old man's splendid failure, Hemingway returns to the role of the perceiver; and what he perceives is once again the stimulating and fatal relation between integrity of character and the churning abundance of experience. His style catches this perception with a good deal of its old power: in the relation (mentioned by Harry Levin) between an abundance of nouns, the signs of things in experience, and the simplicity and paucity of adjectives—signs of the ways we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clutch at experience, seek to punch it into shape and hang on to it. The old man's old man is realised in prose that honors them both.

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison is the most impressive work of fiction in a number of years. It is occasionally melodramatic and self-indulgent, and it is a trifle too long. But the book is a great solid chunk of fictional reality; it has a tremendous sheer existence; its core is inviolable and can stand any amount of scrutiny. The chunk is made up of all kinds and conditions of things, all of them held together by a fierce power of imagination. Melville is Mr. Ellison's major ally; and like *Moby-Dick, Invisible Man* contains sermons and songs and meditations and prayers, dreams and jokes and reminiscent anecdotes; it has fights and funerals and political meetings; it enters colleges, offices, bars, brothels, factories, private homes and star-chambers. The artistic ambition, like Melville's, is to suggest by a circus-vision of the world that reality is to be sought for everywhere and only everywhere, by multiplication rather than by reduction. (It is such a notion, I take it, that led Mr. Ellison back to the widely-ranging novel of the nineteeth century, for comfort and guidance, as against the sparse reductiveness of the Hemingway school.)

The circus-vision is appropriate to the story Mr. Ellison has to tell, for it is a contemporary, Negro version of the clown's grail. His hero is a Negro Charlie Chaplin, skidding around corners and dashing down alleys, endlessly harried by the cops and the crooks of the world, endlessly hurrying in search of whatever it is that can sanctify human existence. On the run, Mr. Ellison's nameless hero is defrauded, betrayed and beaten, as all innocents and fools are born to be; yet, in the great tradition, he acquires a tough, private conscience as a result. *Invisible Man* is not ultimately a "Negro novel"; for just as the odyssey of the eccentric is an account of the condition of human life seen in American perspective, so *Invisible Man* simply passes that condition through yet another perspective, that of the Negro. Its young seeker is the modern hero as American Negro.

His adventures are too numerous for summary, but they share the common element of a droll reversal whereby he invariably achieves the opposite of what he aims at. Hoping to impress a trustee of his college, for example, he exposes the fellow instead to a Negro farmer about to have children simultaneously by wife and daughter. He is swept into service by the communistic "Brotherhood", after starting a riot with a speech intended to prevent one. His best efforts to gain honor with the Brotherhood get him promptly and severely punished; his lectures to women on the improvement of their estate win him instant invitations to their beds. His grand mission to rise in the political and social world concludes with a dive down a manhole: where he decides to hibernate for a while, assessing the value of his clownish quest.

The world Mr. Ellison has contrived for his hero is pictured as a vast, disorderly and utterly spurious ritual, something designed not to bring the seeker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the center of valid energy and to show him its sacred treasures: but to keep him out, to keep him running. College president, industrial magnate, political organizer, libidinous *hausfrau*: all connive to guard the secret of their own emptiness. But while the ritual hawked about by the book's confidence-men is spurious, the experience itself has the form of a genuine rite of passage. The adventures have passed the young man through a series of trials, to the moment of profound change anticipated in the climax. He acknowledges his moral and psychological invisibility, while asserting in darkness an achieved identity. I should say that the ritual is larger than the experience, like a shoe a couple of sizes too big for the foot. Melville admitted some allegorical intention or other, but he could not remember it very clearly; Mr. Ellison appears to have been reading up on his allegories, and the one he wants us to notice is not quite a perfect fit. But wherever the events and the hero's response to them give off their own formal suggestiveness, the novel has that life beyond life which is the nature of art. It is not easy to name a work of fiction since *Light in August* which gives us so much and holds itself so well.

Monroe Engel, the author of *A Length of Rope,* is evidently a man who knows the difference between a novel and the many other uses of language with which the novel is often confused. He tells his story with unobtrusive authority; and while it is not perhaps much of a story, he gives it just the attention it requires; he keeps his distance admirably; and he has a sure hand. The book is a discreetly compassionate investigation into the wreckage of four lives: a grossly powerful, self-detesting St. Francis, named Alexander Forward, who abandons wealth, career, family and friends to seek solace in the ancient way by ministering to others—he takes the job of orderly in a mental hospital; Sheila, the hospital's fleshy, tough-spirited and yet easily victimized nurse; Pippin, a sign-painter with a starved, diminished and dumbly questioning soul; and Pippin's imbecile, speechless son. The action springs from the lopsided efforts of these persons to get at each other: a soggy sexual relation between Forward and Sheila; the marriage of Sheila and Pippin, uniting in a minimal friendship devoted to the care of the child as a way out of the sogginess of two lifetimes; and the endeavor of Forward, affronted by their marriage, to participate in it, by removing what he pretends to think its impediment. He destroys the child—who was, of course, not the blemish but the source of the marriage—and accomplishes thereby his personal goal of self-destruction. The book closes in a silence and cold beyond mere desperation.

Mr. Engel puts these people through their paces in a very competent manner. As to the inner workings of his story, however, I am not so sure. Motivations remain obscure to the characters themselves, while Mr. Engel lets us in for some pretty muddy conversations about the origins and aims of adult behavior. But indeed the most troubling quality of the novel is only one ounce of energy away from its potential strength. It is the muddiness and the sogginess which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are troubling—the (for my taste) excessive amount of sweat and excrement which the book introduces and lingers over. One feels that something here has not quite gotten to the surface, is still entangled in some noisome depth. Yet this is precisely what the book is about: the suffocated desire of a few individuals to clamber out of the swampy region. Sheila's dream is to be ridden "out of the sweaty dark into sunny fields"; Forward's to demonstrate once and for all the truth or falsehood of his dogma that decency is "the tarpaulin over the manure pile, rip it off and look at the stink". The book's perhaps disproportionate look at the stink is due to Mr. Engel's sound intention to delineate experience too much confined to the *soma*, as a prelude to his characters' faltering vision of a life better oriented to the psyche. In so far as that intention is realised, *A Length of Rope* is at once a fulfillment and a promise.

The interest of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* arises from a curious tension in the novel between a rather horridly surrealistic set of characters and incidents and a remarkably pure, luminous prose. The book, which has no real plot, consists chiefly of the private twitchings of several almost totally dislocated individuals; while the language circles about them in a sane and steady flow. The characters seem to be grotesque variations on each other, as even their names suggest: Hazel Motes, Hoover Shoats, Asa Hawks—names uttered antiphonally, in dying echoes, by persons just out of range of each others' voices; like the washerwomen in *Finnegans Wake*. These partial, truncated personalities never suspect that they may be members one of another; though most of them are engaged in grotesque variations of the same evangelical enterprise: the mission of the prophet or the preacher or the Christ. Possibilities of expiation and atonement agitate them all, though from what or for what, no one can say; unless it is the dreadful fact of being alive. It is in the prose that there echoes the promise of health and reunion extravagantly denied to the characters by themselves.

In the world of Miss O'Connor's novel—the Kafkian village removed to the American South—there are nothing *but* eccentrics, individuals who pass their time hoping to trick somebody into shaking hands with them. The principal eccentric is one Hazel Motes, and it is his career that we mainly follow: as he preaches the Church without Christ; as he carefully and without expression murders a rival magician; as he promptly and with no more expression performs the penitential act of blinding himself; as he sinks reticently into death. Hazel Motes has affinities with Nathaniel West's crucifixion-seeking Miss Lonelyhearts, though Hazel is regarded with an extra portion of quirky humor. But Hazel has affinities too with the old man, the invisible man and the others. For while communication is rarely achieved by any of them, the records of their comic or tragic pilgrimages do communicate among themselves and within the same world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HUGH KENNER

The Servant's Looking-glass

1000 YEARS OF IRISH PROSE: *Part I—The Literary Revival*, ed. *Vivian Mercier* and *David H. Greene*. Devin-Adair. $6.00.

MOST ANTHOLOGIES EXIST BECAUSE a public can be made to buy them, but a good anthology has an aim: frequently the aim of showing us what has been going on within given limits, temporal or geographical, of the world of the mind. Aims falter, however, and in addition get compromised by copyright deadlocks, publishers' cold feet, and inhibitions about what the public will swallow. No literary effort is more vulnerable to non-literary pressures. This has tended to obscure the fact that the anthologist has a function not to be confused with mere book-making. He can substitute fact for yatter, and show us, for instance, what a phrase like "Irish Literary Revival" actually covers: which was essentially what Messrs. Mercier and Greene set out to do. Their intelligence and the nature of the material they set out to exhibit makes their wrestle with the chauvinistic Proteus especially instructive.

A nation's writing belongs to that nation's history; only a tiny fraction ever belongs to literature. This fact is always being obscured by the recurrent provincial assumption that where the world applauds a great author one should look for a "movement" of comparable interest, or promote to that status one of the normal shifts of sensibility that are part of the country's political development. Having produced two of the five or so greatest twentieth-century writers of English, the Irish are naturally inclined to talk of their literary revival, of which they naturally expect the representative documents to cover a good many hundred pages. The present publisher, who has an Irish name, announces on the jacket, "This is the first time that the very essence of the Irish Literary Revival has been placed between the covers of a single volume. It is a pioneer undertaking and should prove something of a landmark." So there is no doubt what he wanted ("When the publisher asked us . . .", the editors' preface commences). The editorial principles, however, are admirably unpretentious: "First, no snippets. Second, we would offer what we considered the most readable and the most significant—if there is any distinction between the two—in Irish prose writing from the point where the Literary Revival may be said to have begun to the present day." In other words, "we might satisfy more readers if we first satisfied ourselves."

So far the shaping—and deforming—forces are those of taste: the editors', and other peoples'. It is obvious that the editors were pleased by "Drink and Time in Dublin" (Myles na gCopaleen) or "The Man with the Gift" (Seumas

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

O'Kelly). One can't believe that they were pleased by the 15-page Elizabeth Bowen nullity they have included ("Strokes of the gong, brass bubbles, came bouncing up from the hall". . . . " 'Oh, you do look sweet!' exclaimed the visitor.") It must have been a bore to proofread. But since Mrs. Bowen (like Dr. Gogarty) enjoys the breathless sanction of having appeared in *Vogue*, one may conjecture that the Devin-Adair sales department was well pleased with it. Nor can one imagine editors who had the wit to include Yeats' *Resurrection* taking pleasure in the high-school-reader prose of the Colum story ("Maelshaughlinn at the Fair") with its copybook finale (" 'Never go into the fair where you have no business.' That's a wise saying, and it's a saying that will be a guide to me for the rest of the days of my life.") Mr. Colum, however, has his following. A certain amount of foam-rubber finds its way into every six-dollar compilation, and it would be tactless to enquire further.

Unhappily, the editors' resolve to satisfy themselves has been corrupted by something more insidious than the existence of a purchasing public bred to contrary satisfactions. On the second page of the Introduction a *theory* emerges. "We not only believe that the Literary Revival was a movement but also that its ideals were defined and its destination charted very largely by one man." This theory is quite likely correct. It has led to a book bracketed by early Yeats at one end (*Cathleen ni Houlihan*) and by late Yeats at the other (*The Resurrection*), with six subdivisions corresponding roughly to Yeatsian phases (his career, not his moon). Not that this thematic arrangement hasn't something to recommend it. The majority of what has been written in Ireland—or anywhere else—during a 70-year period may as well be laid out for the curious in labelled chunks if it is going to be laid out at all. But a movement that lays claim on international attention has presumably produced pages of interest to an educated Frenchman or Japanese, and it is just such pages that an over-bureaucratized book, however defensible its theory, will bury or exclude.

Take the case of Synge, martyred by a schema. Section II ("The Living World for Text") is intended to represent an emergence, around the turn of the century, of the Irish writer from mythological interests. It is headed by Synge's preface to *The Playboy*, followed by a long extract from the diary of his studies in the living world, *The Aran Islands*. This includes the peasant anecdote of the man who feigned death to trap his wife's lover, so the next selection is *In the Shadow of the Glen*, the play Synge wrote on this theme. The progression makes a neat thesis in literary history, but it leaves Synge to stand or fall by his earliest and least accomplished play. He told the story better in two diary pages, and the "treatment" isn't of sufficient interest to justify its separability from the "subject". This isn't to wish that the editors had plumped, conventionally, for *The Playboy*, which doesn't wear well. Its famous lilt is mechanical and soon predictable:

> Providence and Mercy, / spare us all!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> And there was no one in it / but the two of you alone?
>
> She'd be stringing gabble / till the dawn of day.
>
> . . . lead that lad forward / for to lodge with me.
>
> . . . did rouse your spirits / to a deed of blood.

—these come from two pages; the movement is almost as open to parody as that of *Hiawatha*. Synge would have been best served by inclusion of his real linguistic creation, the *Deirdre*, despite its length and its architectural failings (no worse, surely, than *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which is accorded 50 pages and makes one wonder about the reputation of O'Casey). No other prose feels quite like that of *Deirdre of the Sorrows;* Mr. Empson was right to be interested in it twenty years ago:

> I see the flames of Emain starting upward in the dark night; and because of me there will be weasels and wild cats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies and red gold, the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever. . . .

But Synge is supposed to typify a new interest in the real world of peasant speech, and the *Deirdre* would have had to be put back in Part I ("Old Eire and the Ancient Ways"), along with the Standish O'Grady "epic" diction Joyce lampooned in the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*, and Lady Gregory's own version of the Deirdre story.

Yeats too has been badly served. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is of great historical importance; its author was able to silence a hostile audience five years later by shouting "The author of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* addresses you". I take this fact from the Introduction, where the editors have put it in extenuation of what they know is an unimpressive choice. All it proves is that "historical importance" is likely to mean, in modern Ireland, a degree of popular status shared in America by "A Message to Garcia". One is tempted to say that the Movement's indebtedness to Yeats consists in its having assumed the clothes he discarded. One may also cite Ezra Pound's remark that Movements frequently result from a small man's attempt to avoid the defects of a great one; Yeats wasn't a peasant realist, hence, one supposes, Daniel Corkery and Liam O'Flaherty doggedly are. Corkery has in "Rock-of-the-Mass" a moving theme, but like most of the short story writers represented he doesn't know enough about writing; the initial exposition is almost too clumsy to be gotten through. Surveying, on the whole, what by action and reaction *Cathleen* may be said to have led to, one regrets its displacing that much more impressive piece of early Yeatsian prose "The Tables of the Law", which James Joyce at twenty knew by heart. The inclusion of that story would have dispelled, by epitomizing Yeats' debt to Pater and Lionel Johnson, the editorial implication that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Revival simply combined a rediscovered bardic past with a newly scrutinized heroic present. And "The Tables of the Law" possesses historic importance of a more significant kind: without it, we might not have Stephen Dedalus.

One gets such editorial solecisms in any compilation whose items are arranged to illustrate something. But the reader who doesn't know whether the minor writers actually offered anything much for the editors to pick from may well suspect a policy that maims the giants of being unfair to the lesser talents: can it be that James Stephens' reputation is backed by nothing more negotiable than the pretentious blarney of "The Two Gods" and the "calculated naiveté" (the editors' phrase) of "The Unworthy Princess"? And what component of the tradition causes such outbursts of "fine writing" as the prelude to O'Faolain's "Midsummer Night Madness" or the detachable tinsel ("In the grey silence he had yet time to burrow into the secret flower of chaos whose pollen was blood") that mars so strong a conception as the excerpted portion of Francis Stuart's *Redemption?*

Suppressing such uneasiness, one may—having read the anthology through—conclude of the Irish Literary Revival, *inter alia,*

(1) That not one Irish realist had the wit to learn anything essential from Joyce, whose Parnell Christmas-dinner dialogue from the *Portrait* (titled by the editors "Dead King") makes most of the other dialogue-writing in the book sound either silly or clumsy.

(2) That the "stage Irishman" was much longer dying than one has been led to suppose.

(3) That apart from Joyce and Yeats the revival has produced little prose worth the time of our hypothetical cultivated Frenchman or Japanese, though a great deal of it has, as one might expect, the charm for a non-Hibernian that even minor French or Japanese talent always possess for the stranger. The Irishman's gift of gab is sure to appeal whenever a writer chooses to exploit it.

(4) That the Irish writing of this century nevertheless differs from the British in ways that can't be ascribed to the stone of Blarney. For one thing, the Irish writers had a subject of some magnitude (a century of political history compressed into three decades). For another, they broke with the slicker nineteenth-century models rather earlier than their English counterparts, so escaping the sham gentility that has been the curse of recent fiction in England. Encouraged perhaps by the fact that Joyce looked for assistance to Norway and Yeats to France, as well as by the presence of gunmen in their streets, the story-writers read people who had read Zola instead of people who had read Bulwer-Lytton. Finally, they had the advantage that the shoals of tradesmen and promoters to whose pecuniary advantage it is that people be forever *reading* had not (have not yet?) gotten organized to the same extent as in Anglo-Saxonry. Unhappily, few of the writers so fortunately situated had read enough or knew enough or cared enough for their art to profit significantly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is not to describe the present anthology as a waste of time. O'Kelly's "The Man with the Gift" is a little masterpiece, and "The Grey Dawn" (Patrick Kavanagh) is a bit of literary history worth many prefaces:

> " 'Any stir on the paper?' a fellow asked me.
> " 'Plenty,' I replied. 'Gertrude Stein is after writing a new book.'
> " 'Quit the coddin'. How's the markets goin'? My sowl, this looks like a bad pit to-day.' "

And Myles na gCopaleen (= Brian Nolan = Flann O'Brien) has a wonderful gift for that music-hall turn the imitation of Dublin speech, though he has yet to discover a comic subject of any weight, and the climate of Dublin wit being what it is[2], he probably won't; hence *At Swim-Two-Birds* is simply a pointless, wonderfully-sustained parody of everything you can think of. Still, it is worth a few minutes to hear him perform like this:

> —Did you go to that picture *The Lost Weekend?*
> —*I did.*
> —I never seen such tripe.
> —*What was wrong with it?*
> —O it was all right, of course—bits of it was good. Your man in the jigs inside in the bed and the bat flying in to kill the mouse, that was *damn* good. I'll tell you another good bit. Hiding the bottles in the jax. And there was no monkey business about that because I tried it since meself. It works but you have to use the half pint bottles. Up the chimbley is another place I thought of and do you know the ledge affair above windows?
> —*I do.*
> —That's another good place but you could get a hell of a fall reaching up there on a ladder or standing on chairs with big books on them. . . .

Torn as they are between their own taste, a theory of history, and what publishers think the public wants, Messrs. Mercier and Greene have yet managed to capture enough of the elusive Revival to interest non-Hibernians and include, without serious compromise, enough entertainment to merit excellent sales. One awaits the perspective of 930 years promised by their second volume.

---

[2]For instance, a recent issue of the Irish magazine *Envoy*, in which Mr. gCopaleen/Nolan/O'Brien seemed quite at home, was devoted to proving that Joyce was nothing but a parochial bad boy and university wit (like the contributors) who, not having understood the obligation to be magnificently indolent, had strenuously won a reputation among owlish Americans. He got, said one contributor, more values out of the word "drawers" than any other known old Clongownian.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GEORGE BARBAROW

The Contradictions of S. Eisenstein

SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN, by *Marie Seton*. A. A. Wyn. $8.50.

EISENSTEIN'S CAREER WAS BASED UPON two assumptions: that the cinema is a mass medium, and that the state possesses full authority over the form and substance of an artist's work. The assumptions are doubtless absurd in any absolute sense, yet they probably fit the facts of life in the Soviet Union, where, theoretically at least, nonconformance means nonperformance.

The biography is a recital of contradictions, and, for the most part, failures. The man had tremendous talent and creative energy; he also lacked faith in his work when it came into conflict with the opinions of his political superiors. He was submissive, almost spineless, in the face of adverse criticism from authorized sources. The first test came in 1927, at the time of the Trotsky revolt. While making *October*, Eisenstein, "occupied with matters of montage, had failed to follow this struggle [between Stalin and Trotsky], or foresee the extent of the schism growing daily wider in Marxist interpretation. Suddenly, instead of his work being acclaimed, it was held up. It was pointed out to him that *October* could not possibly be released as scheduled because it showed Trotsky as a hero of the October Revolution when now, in actuality, Trotsky had proved himself a betrayer of the Revolution" (P. 101). Miss Seton does not indicate Eisenstein's immediate reaction to this crude reversal, or whether or not he protested, or whether or not he made further inquiry into the facts of the intramural struggle for power. We are told that he spent five months excising the image of Trotsky from his historical film. What is most important here is not the rightness or wrongness of the protagonists, but the artist's willingness to accept the outcome, which meant the mutilation of his work by his own hand. Any representation of historical events is of course "wrong" in the sense that it is not the original fact, but a distortion of the fact. Even the witnesses and participants cannot perceive it fully. It follows that encroachment upon the sovereignty of an artist involves substitution of one distortion for another; the state is the artist. To assume the rightness of the state's version is to deny the rightness of the individual artist, who has enough trouble with his work already, without having to change it on orders from outside. Eisenstein must have been basically unsure of his own insight, for he not only changed this and other films in response to the state's "creative criticism", but also found elaborately servile reasons for doing it. He was evidently the model of the disciplined Soviet citizen.

Conviction in the Soviet ideology sustained him esthetically while he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas

1934–1953

Since the publication of *Eighteen Poems,* when Dylan Thomas was twenty, his work has steadily acquired a larger public and increased reputation. About his second book, Dr. Edith Sitwell said in 1936: "The work of this young man is on a huge scale, both in theme and structurally." Three years later, in reviewing the poems in *The World I Breathe,* Herbert Read said: "They contain the most absolute poetry that has been written in our time." Only recently Philip Toynbee wrote: "It need no longer be eccentric to claim that Thomas is the greatest living poet in the English language."

$3.75

NEW DIRECTIONS
333 Sixth Ave., New York, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Hollywood in 1930, working under contract to the Paramount Studio. Two scenarios, *An American Tragedy* and *Sutter's Gold* were not acceptable, and Eisenstein refused to make compromising changes in them. He could resist Hollywood executives with admirable intransigence. The same kind of artistic backbone in Russia might then have left him without any chance to work in his chosen medium, for he apparently never seriously considered independent film production on a private basis. When he signed the fantastic contract to make a picture in Mexico cheaply, both he and his sponsors, Mr. and Mrs. Upton Sinclair, seem to have looked forward to successful exhibition in the mass market. The assumption, or illusion, that the cinema as a fine art is necessarily a mass medium was almost a guarantee of failure.[1]

Back in Russia, there were more Eisensteinian repudiations. It was "pointed out to him" that his ideas about an intellectual cinema were wrong, that preoccupation with film theory was a chimerical pursuit, that *Bezhin Lug* was "incorrect", that *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* was being suppressed because of its "irresponsible falsification of historical reality". The artist was often "nervous and disappointed", but each time his work was halted he published confessions of his "errors". It seems that Soviet audiences cannot place full trust in the intuition and creative imagination of an artist without first awaiting certification by a government committee whose exquisite sensibilities can discern mistakes even before a work is finished.

Without explicitly questioning the authority of the state, Miss Seton searches for sources of failure in Eisenstein's personal background, and discovers many details that are pertinent to her main theme of maladjustment. Sergei Mikhailovich was the product of a broken marriage in a bourgeois milieu. His father supported the Whites after 1917, and his mother spent her life in search of comfort, trying meanwhile to retain possession of her son. The time of his youth and adolescence was a time of external crisis that was social, moral, economic, and political. Shy, sensitive, and sexually inhibited to an extreme degree, Eisenstein took refuge in culture and ideas. He remained throughout his life emotionally unstable and immature. In revolt against his parents, he seems to have found a new family in the state, but, as we have seen, he was unable to accomplish a second revolt, a revolt that might have made him a complete, not a potential, genius.

There can be no doubt that Eisenstein had an enormous talent. He was gifted in languages and drawing, could discern suggestive images everywhere about him, could recognize and assimilate the values of any work of art from almost

[1]The belief is common among people who should know better. A recent expression may be found in *London Letter*, by Geoffrey Rans (HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn 1952). Discussing *Murder in the Cathedral*, Mr. Rans remarks: "A mass medium like the cinema obviously demands a compromise, and Eliot has been willing to make it . . .", and Rans later repeats the thought in different words, ". . . for popular appeal—and the cinema has to have this—screenplays will have to be specially written . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hudson Review

announces for future publication:

Robert M. Adams:	Art as Insurrection
Saul Bellow:	Mintouchian (*story*)
John Berryman:	Shakespeare at Thirty
Richard Clay:	Rain on Prize Day (*story*)
Louis O. Coxe:	Beddoes: The Mask of Parody
George P. Elliott:	Miss Cudahy of Stowes Landing (*story*)
Alan Friedman:	The Search (*story*)
Jorge Guillen:	New Poems, *with translations by* W. S. Merwin
Stanley Edgar Hyman:	The Albertine Strategy
Hugh Kenner:	The Revenge of the Void
Richmond Lattimore:	Translations from Archilochus
Reinhold Niebuhr:	The Hiss Affair
Charles S. Singleton:	End of a Poem
Allen Tate:	Lord Acton

Poetry by Dorothy Donnelly, Harry Duncan, Richard Eberhart, William Meredith, W. S. Merwin, Josephine Miles, Edwin Muir, Herbert Read, Louis Simpson and others.

Chronicles and Reviews by William Arrowsmith, George Barbarow, William Becker, Joseph Bennett, Irma Brandeis, Robert Fitzgerald, R. W. Flint, Joseph Frank, Northrop Frye, John Holloway, Joseph Kerman, Frederick Morgan and others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any culture, and could seize an idea and make it his own, apparently in a flash. He could produce a film from rough sketch through all the stages to the final print. He had relentless curiosity, boundless imagination, brilliant intuition. "But," writes his biographer on Page 352, "Sergei Mikhailovich was a sincere revolutionary, even though his understanding of Marxism was often not in accord with other Marxists." Accord, it seems, is more important than insight, and "other Marxists" found ways to keep their bright boy within proper bounds. After the one unfettered achievement of "creative ecstasy" that was *Potemkin*, the artist, lacking real confidence, could not defy the restraint, nor transform it, nor fly from it, and so his life became at last an apology for his unrealized dreams.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF THE HUDSON REVIEW, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1952.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, The Hudson Review, Inc., 439 West Street, New York 14, N. Y.; Editors, William Arrowsmith, Joseph Bennett and Frederick Morgan; Managing Editor, Lisa Dyer, all same address.

2. The owner is: The Hudson Review, Inc., 439 West Street, New York 14, N. Y., a New York membership corporation not authorized to issue stock, whose members are: Joseph Bennett, Constance Morgan and Frederick Morgan, all same address.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

LISA DYER, Managing Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18th day of September, 1952.

WILLIAM G. NIBLETTE

(My commission expires March 30, 1954.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Princeton UNIVERSITY PRESS

Hemingway: THE WRITER AS ARTIST

By CARLOS BAKER. "The full content and meaning of Hemingway's books has not hitherto been so fully described, nor has so ambitious an effort been made to situate Hemingway in his personal and historical milieu, or to define the moral and aesthetic problems his whole work raises. However the reader may differ in his judgment on Hemingway's achievement, his basis for any such judgment will be enlarged and strengthened by the analysis he finds here. I assume that this will be the most detailed book on Hemingway for some time to come."—*Morton Dauwen Zabel.*

342 pages, including "A Working Check-List of Hemingway's Prose, Poetry, and Journalism—with Notes." *$4.50*

Melville's Quarrel with God

By LAWRANCE THOMPSON. The author argues that Mellville, seeking to disguise his agonized conviction of the cruelty and malice of God, consistently satirized Christian doctrine by resorting to literary deceptions that could simultaneously satirize and hoodwink his orthodox readers. "This book will upset Melville readers more than any book about his mind and art published in many years. There will be controversy in which the brilliance of many of the analyses, the subtlety and soundness of many of the perceptions will be ignored as the brickbats fly."—*N. Y. Times.*

"An atom bomb that will explode right in the midst of established Melville criticism and, very probably, blow it to smithereens. . . . Mr. Thompson's absorbing and challenging study is worth all the rest of the Melville interpretation that has been published."—*Arizona Quarterly.* *475 pages, $6.00*

ORDER FROM YOUR BOOKSTORE, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED